

OCTOBER 1980

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K47744

MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

**SPECIAL THEME ISSUE:
CRIMES IN OTHER TIMES**

MAYHEM IN THE MAGIC CITY

**A novel of Wartime Miami
by Brett Halliday**

With stories and features by

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OCTOBER 1980
VOLUME 44
NUMBER 10
ISSN 0026-3621

MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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MAYHEM IN THE MAGIC CITY

by Brett Halliday

[1943]

It seemed a simple-enough assignment for the big redheaded detective: find a missing soldier. With wife Phyllis in the hospital preparing to give birth to their child, Mike Shayne had a lot on his mind. Then the "simple" case exploded into an adventure of intrigue, espionage and assassination — the outcome of which could give the Nazis an edge they needed to become victors in World War II

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MAYHEM IN THE MAGIC CITY

by BRETT HALLIDAY



I. MISSION FOR A REDHEAD

THERE DIDN'T SEEM TO BE A THING WRONG with the world.

Michael Shayne stood in front of the window in his third floor apartment overlooking the Miami River flowing into Biscayne Bay. Across the Bay, Miami Beach was resplendent in the bright afternoon sunshine. It might be obvious at night during the partial blackout, but in the light of day, you'd never guess there was a war on. The games and the gaiety went on as usual, perhaps a bit more frenetic than normal, as everyone tried very hard not to think about the German submarines rumored to be cruising just a few miles off the coast.

Shayne wasn't thinking about blackouts or submarines or war, though. He was sipping on a glass of cognac and thinking what a lucky man he was. He could hear the humming of his wife, Phyllis, as she moved around the apartment behind him. More than anything else, she was the reason for his good mood. Yeah, Phyllis and the brand new life she was carrying inside her.

Shayne turned around. He was a tall man, with the broad shoulders and narrow hips of an athlete, and a shock of always rumpled red hair. A smile creased his rugged face as he watched Phyllis going through some baby things they had already bought. She was lovelier than ever, there was no doubt about that, even though her normally slim, lithe figure was temporarily gone. As Shayne watched her, she glanced up and gave him a flashing smile that lighted up her dark eyes. She broke into a fragment of a tuneless song.

"You're happy, aren't you, Angel?" Shayne asked.

"Of course, Michael," she replied. "Why in the world wouldn't I be?"

"Impending motherhood does agree with you," Shayne allowed.

Phyllis rolled her eyes. "Very impending. The doctor keeps saying any day now, any day now. I'm getting impatient, Michael."

"You and me both, Phyl." Shayne's mind went back to the time when Phyllis had told him that he was going to be a father. Shayne had had a lot of shocks in his time; you don't spend years in the private detective game without some surprises — but that was one of the most stunning pieces of news he had ever received. He and Phyllis both wanted children very much, but somehow he wasn't prepared for it just yet. The idea had grown on him during the past few months, though, and now he was getting as impatient as his wife.

"Why don't you go down to the office?" she suggested. "You don't have to stay with me every minute, Michael. I'll be all right."

"I think I'd rather stick around here."

Phyllis gave an exaggerated sigh. "Honestly, even a pregnant

woman needs a few minutes alone every now and then. You've been turning down cases for weeks now, Michael, and that's not like you. If you're not careful, I'm going to start thinking you're sick."

"I just want to be here if anything happens," Shayne protested.

"The office is right downstairs, Michael. If I need you, I'll thump on the floor with a broom."

Shayne stepped up beside her, narrowed his eyes and glared, and said, "Are you trying to get rid of me, woman?"

"Boy, it's easy to see why you became a detective."

Shayne was unable to restrain the laughter that came from him. He bent over, brushed a kiss over Phyllis's forehead, and said, "All right, you win. I'll go downstairs. Maybe a big case will walk in."

"We could use the money," Phyllis said. "I don't think you realize how much a baby can cost, Michael."

Shayne finished his drink, set the glass down on the bar, and strolled toward the door. "You let me know right away if anything starts to happen," he admonished over his shoulder.

"Of course, Michael."

Shayne reached for the door knob, but before his hand could get there, a knock came from the other side. He looked back at Phyllis, raised his craggy red brows, and then opened the door.

The young man in the hall said, "Mr. Shayne?"

"That's right," Shayne said. "What can I do for you, soldier?"

The young man was in the uniform of a private in the Army Air Corps. He looked like he was barely out of his teens, with brown eyes and close-cropped brown hair. Shayne saw dozens of soldiers just like him all the time. They were in abundant supply because of the military bases around Miami. More and more soldiers had appeared in the city as the war went on, and some of the hotels had been closed to the public so that the Army could use them for-military housing.

"I've heard that you're a private detective," the soldier in the hall went on. "I'd like to hire you. I went to your office downstairs, but there was no one there. The desk clerk told me that you lived in the apartment above. I hope you don't mind me coming up here like this."

"No, I was just on my way down to the office myself,"

Phyllis' voice came from behind him. "Invite the young man in, Michael."

Shayne glanced over his shoulder and said, "That's all right, Angel, we'll just go downstairs — "

"I insist." Phyllis had stood up, a trifle awkwardly, and come over to stand beside him. "You can talk business right here."

Shayne shrugged. "Well, all right. Come on in, son."

The young man stepped into the apartment, twisting his uniform cap rather nervously in his hands. Shayne waved him into a comfortable armchair, then settled down on the sofa next to Phyllis. Her soft hand stole into his and held it.

"Would you like a drink?" Shayne offered.

"No, sir, thank you." The boy seemed to be sitting at attention.

Shayne grinned. "At ease, soldier. Now what's the problem?"

"It's a friend of mine, Mr. Shayne. I'm worried about him. He's . . . Well, he's disappeared."

"AWOL?"

"I don't think so. I'm afraid something may have happened to him. Jerry's just not the type to go AWOL."

"How about some names, so we'll know who we're talking about?"

"Oh, of course. I'm Harvey Sheppard, and my friend is Jerry Briggs. We're both privates, and we're stationed at Richmond Lighter-Than-Air. You know, the air base south of here."

"I've been there," Shayne nodded. "How long has your friend been missing?"

"Since last night. He had a pass, but he was supposed to be back on base by ten o'clock. He never showed up."

Shayne frowned. "Then he was listed as AWOL when he missed roll call this morning, right?"

Sheppard shook his head. "No, sir. Not that I know of."

"The MP's don't know about him being gone?"

Sheppard spread his hands. "There's been no investigation, I'm sure of that. That's one reason why I'm so confused by the whole thing."

Shayne's hand, the one Phyllis wasn't holding, strayed up to tug on his left earlobe. He said, "That is a little strange. With a war on, anything out of the ordinary usually gets checked out pretty good. You said Briggs had a pass. Do you know where he went?"

"He was coming in to Miami Beach. At least that's what he said. There's a girl over there he's been making a play for."

"Could they have run off together?"

Sheppard shook his head. "Jerry's not the kind of guy who would just go running off like that. I haven't known him too long, but he always seemed so very serious about his duties. Don't get me wrong; he liked to have fun, and he's always chasing the ladies — excuse me, ma'am — but as far as deliberately ignoring his responsibilities, I don't think he'd do that."

"You said you haven't known him long? Why are you so interested in finding out what's happened to him?"

Sheppard smiled. "The guy's my friend, Mr. Shayne. You know how it is when you pal around with a guy. You don't want to see him getting into trouble." The smile went off his face, and he sighed. "It's bad enough when you have to watch your buddies going off overseas, when you know a lot of them won't be coming back. We train a lot of pilots at the base, and from there, they go to England, or Hawaii, and then on into combat. I know; I'm a clerk in the records division."

"What about Briggs? Is he in the same outfit?"

"Yes, sir. We both work at the HQ." He paused. "What about it, Mr. Shayne? Will you take the case and try to find Jerry? If you can find him and get him back to the base, maybe he won't even get into any trouble. I don't know why he hasn't been listed as AWOL, but as long as he hasn't . . ."

Shayne scraped a thumbnail along his jaw. "Well, I don't know."

He felt Phyllis squeezing his hand slightly and looked over at her. There was a determined look in her eyes.

"If it's a matter of your fee," Sheppard said, misinterpreting Shayne's reticence, "I think I can afford it. I know I'm just a private, but my dad has money. He's Jeffrey Sheppard."

Shayne had heard of Sheppard Industries. If he remembered right, they had several plants in the Midwest involved in munitions production. If this private was one of those Sheppards, he wouldn't have to worry about surviving on what the Army paid him.

Phyllis leaned over and whispered briefly in Shayne's ear. He said, "Excuse me for a second, soldier. I think my wife wants to talk to me."

"Of course, sir."

Shayne and Phyllis got up and moved across the room to stand in front of the window. In a low voice, Phyllis asked, "You're going to take the case, aren't you, Michael?"

Shayne frowned. "I don't know, Phyl. It sounds like it might take a lot of legwork, and I wouldn't be able to stick around here with you . . . Besides, the Briggs kid is probably all right. Odds are he just had a little too much to drink and is sleeping it off in a hotel somewhere."

"But that might not be what happened. And his friend is worried. Private Sheppard seems like a nice boy."

"That boy is only a couple of years younger than you, Angel."

"What does that have to do with anything? Anyway, you heard him. He can afford to pay you a good fee. And we could use some money right now, Michael."

Shayne nodded. "I suppose you're right. I'll be checking in on you, though, to make sure you're all right."

"I'll be fine," Phyllis said, her eyes glowing, "now that my big

tough shamus of a husband is back doing what he does best."

Shayne squeezed her shoulder and wondered, not for the first time, how it had been his good fortune to come up with such a treasure. He turned back to Sheppard and said, "All right, private, I'll look into it for you."

Sheppard bounced to his feet. "Thank you, Mr. Shayne," he exclaimed. "I've heard a lot of good things about you since I came to Miami, and I'm sure you'll find Jerry. Should I give you some money now?"

"A hundred will do for a retainer and expenses, at least to start."

Sheppard handed Shayne several bills, which the big detective folded and slipped inside his wallet. Then he said, "What about this girl your friend was going to see? Had they been going together long? Where can I find her?"

"She's staying at the Royal Palm Hotel," Sheppard told him. "Her name is Sandra Van Ness, and she's there with her parents. She and Jerry aren't really going together; I think it was more a matter of he's interested in her, but he hasn't gotten very far yet. From the way Jerry talks, I think that she's got another boyfriend."

"I'll have a talk with her," Shayne grunted. "How can I get in touch with you if I find out anything?"

"Just call the base and ask for the records office. I'm there most of the time." He reached in his pocket, pulled out a photo, and handed it to Shayne. "Here's a snapshot of him I took." The picture showed a grinning, dark-haired young man, also in his early twenties.

Sheppard thanked Shayne again, smiled politely at Phyllis, and then left the apartment, slapping his cap back on his head and marching smartly down the hall. Shayne closed the door behind him and turned back to Phyllis, who was looking a little sad.

"He seems too young," she said. "All of the soldiers do. And yet they're fighting a war."

"Yeah," Shayne said. "It doesn't seem fair, does it? But try telling it to Hitler or Tojo."

"Are you going over to the Beach?"

Shayne settled his Panama on his red head, "I thought I would." He put his arms around her gently, kissed her forehead and then her lips. "Now that you've made me into a working detective again, I guess I'd better go earn my fee."

II. THE ROYAL PALM

TRAFFIC WAS FAIRLY LIGHT THIS AFTERNOON. Gas rationing had cut down quite a bit on driving, not to mention the speed limit of

thirty-five miles per hour. Shayne turned off Biscayne Boulevard onto the Seventy-Ninth Street Causeway and pointed his roadster toward the Beach.

The Royal Palm was one of the hotels that still catered to the tourist trade. Shayne cruised down Ocean Avenue, watching through the gaps between the luxury hotels, watching the waves of the Atlantic come washing in. When he reached the Royal Palm, he found a place in their parking lot and then went strolling through the double glass doors into the big lobby.

A bored-looking clerk in a blue blazer said, "Yes? May I help you?" when Shayne stepped up to the desk.

"I'm looking for Miss Van Ness," Shayne said.

"Miss Van Ness is in at the moment, I believe. I'll have to call and announce you. Whom shall I say is calling?"

"Michael Shayne."

A little more interest came into the clerk's eyes. "Aren't you the private detective? I read about that case you solved in Colorado last year. I must say, Tim Rourke makes your cases sound fascinating."

"Rourke tends to let his typewriter get ahead of his brain," Shayne replied. Rourke, the ace reporter of the *Miami Daily News*, was an old and trusted friend, but he sometimes made Shayne's cases sound more lurid than they actually were. Of course, there had been that case a year or so before, in which he and Rourke had kept finding and then losing the body of a beautiful blond murder victim. That one hadn't needed any of Rourke's jazzing up.

"So how about calling up to Miss Van Ness?" Shayne went on.

"Sure." The clerk picked up a telephone and asked for Suite 1200. A moment later, he said, "Miss Van Ness? This is Bernard, down at the desk. There's a man down here who would like to see you. His name is Michael Shayne." He was silent for a moment as he listened to the reply, then he covered the receiver and said, "She'd like to know what it concerns, Mr. Shayne."

"Tell her I'm working on a case, and it's about Jerry Briggs."

The clerk relayed the message, said, "Thank you," and then hung up. He smiled at Shayne and said, "You can go right up. Miss Van Ness will be expecting you."

"Thanks." Shayne nodded to the man and then crossed the polished tile floor of the lobby to the bank of elevators on one wall. An elderly operator in a uniform that didn't fit well took him up to the twelfth floor.

Suite 1200 took up half the floor, as far as Shayne could tell. At least, there were only two doors leading off the short hall. Shayne knocked on

the heavy mahogany door, which was covered with ornate, gilt-inlaid carving.

A girl's voice came from the other side. "It's open," she called.

Shayne turned the knob and pushed the door open. He stepped into the suite and looked around. The place was fancy, all right, with ankle-deep carpet, embossed wallpaper, and an electric chandelier hanging from the ceiling. There was a well-stocked portable bar on one wall, and across the room, French doors led out onto a balcony. The doors were open, and sunlight streamed into the room. Shayne could see the figure of the girl outlined against the light as she stood on the balcony. She glanced over her shoulder and called, "Out here, Mr. Shayne."

He put his hands in his pockets and went through the doors onto the balcony. Sandra Van Ness was leaning against the railing, gazing intently out to sea.

Shayne said, "Miss Van Ness?"

Without turning around, she answered, "You're Michael Shayne, aren't you? You've become something of a local celebrity, what with all these fascinating cases you work on. Are you working now?"

"Yes, I am. I'd like to ask you some questions."

She turned around to lean back against the railing, seemingly oblivious to the fact that twelve stories of nothingness yawned on the other side of it. The wind was strong up this high, and it was whipping her long chestnut hair around her face. She wore a beige silk shirt, open at the throat and plunging to the top of her high breasts, and dark brown slacks. Her lounging attitude emphasized the thrusts and curves of her figure.

She shrugged her shoulders. "I don't see what a private eye wants with me, but ask away, Mr. Shayne. I'll try to answer your questions."

"You do know a soldier named Jerry Briggs?"

"Yes, I've met him a few times. He's even asked me out a time or two, but I haven't accepted yet."

"How did you happen to meet him?"

"Oh, I like to go down to the Servicemen's Pier occasionally and help out, you know, do my bit on the homefront. When I'm not too busy, that is. I met him there a few weeks ago, right after he got stationed here."

Shayne shook out a cigarette, raised his eyebrows at Sandra Van Ness, and when she nodded, lit it, struggling to do so for a second in the strong breeze. He said, "Did you see him last night?"

Sandra frowned. "No. Was I supposed to?"

"He told a buddy of his that he was coming to see you. He had a pass for the evening, but he never returned to the base. I thought maybe

you'd know what happened to him."

Sandra shook her head. "I'm afraid not. I didn't even know he was coming into town last night. We certainly didn't have a date."

"You have another boyfriend, do you?" Shayne asked casually.

The girl stiffened perceptibly. "I don't see what that has to do with it."

"I know what a pest some guys can be, Miss Van Ness, always hanging around and asking you for dates when you're already going with another guy. If he showed up here last night and you sent him packing, I'll understand."

Sandra's breathing had quickened. She swung around to look back at the ocean lapping gently at the sandy beach far below. She said, "It wasn't like that at all. I told you, I didn't see Jerry yesterday."

"When did you see him last?"

Again, she shrugged elaborately. "I couldn't really say. Sometime last week, I imagine. You know, down at the Pier."

"And just where were you last night?"

"What kind of question is that?" she asked sharply.

"If you weren't here, then you wouldn't know if Briggs came to the hotel or not, would you?" Shayne said calmly.

"Oh. I see. Well, I was here, all evening, in fact. My parents can testify to that."

"Oh, we're not talking about anyone having to testify." Shayne's voice was nonchalant, offhand. "If you say you were here, that's fine. I guess I'll just have to look for Briggs somewhere else."

She had been getting increasingly nervous as he asked questions, a fact Shayne was well aware of. Now, as he turned away, she asked hurriedly, "Why are you investigating this, Mr. Shayne? If Jerry's gone AWOL, isn't it a military matter?"

"I'm looking into it for a friend of his," Shayne said. "We're trying to keep Jerry from getting into trouble. You wouldn't want to see him get in trouble, would you?"

"Of course not."

"By the way, Miss Van Ness, where are your parents?"

She smiled. "Mommy and Daddy are involved in a hot bridge game down in the lounge. We come to Miami every year, just like everyone else in our circle, and all of the parents spend the time playing bridge."

"And what do the young people do?"

"We have a hell of a lot more fun than our parents." She laughed, but it sounded slightly forced. "Of course, it was more fun before the war. Then there were still a lot of boys around here."

"There are a lot of soldiers around now."

She made a face. "Yes, but they all look alike in those uniforms. You can't tell which ones have money."

Shayne had to repress a snort. To cover up his reaction to her mercenary impulses, he said, "Quite a view from up here."

"Yes, it is. Did you read in the paper about that tanker that the Germans sank offshore a few nights ago? Well, I saw it go up. I was right here on the balcony, and all of a sudden there was this bright light, and it kept getting brighter. It was pulsing, almost, and then it slowly died away." She turned brown eyes that were cold despite their beauty on Shayne. "It was really quite pretty."

Shayne was glad to get out of there.

The same operator took him back down in the elevator. As he rode the slow-moving car, he considered what Sandra Van Ness had told him. Not many of the things she had told him about Jerry Briggs had rung true. Shayne had a feeling that he had been there at the hotel the night before, and that Sandra had seen him, all right.

When he emerged into the lobby from the elevator, he headed for a door on the other side of the desk, rather than the exit. Rapping on the door, he pushed it open.

The man sitting at the desk inside looked up at him and exclaimed, "Howdy, shamus! What are you up to?"

"Working on a case, Ed. Think you could help me out?"

The house detective took his feet off the desk and straightened up in his chair. "Sure, Mike. What is it you need?"

Shayne pulled out the photograph that Sheppard had given him. "Have you seen this GI around lately, especially last night?"

Ed studied the picture for a moment, then suddenly said, "Sure! This is the kid that's been bothering Miss Van Ness."

"Persistent, is he?"

Ed grinned. "I'll say. Won't take no for an answer. I took him aside one evenin' in the dining room when he was pestering her and told him to lay off. A guy has to realize sooner or later that every dame in the world don't think he's so grand, I told him. Told him he'd be better off finding somebody who appreciated his charms."

Shayne chuckled. "What did he say to that?"

"He wasn't having any. Said that girl was the only one he was interested in. Said that the way he saw it, it was his patriotic duty to get her to go out with him."

"What about last night? Was he here?"

"Come to think of it, I believe he was. No, I know he was. I was in the lobby right after dinner, and I saw him come in. I remember

thinkin' that I hoped he didn't cause no trouble. He seems like a nice kid. I wouldn't want to get rough with him."

"What did he do?"

"Went up in the elevator. He musta behaved himself; at least, I didn't get no complaints."

"All right, thanks, Ed. You've confirmed at least one of my suspicions."

He turned to go, but the house detective stopped him by saying, "I heard that you and that pretty wife of yours were expectin'. You a daddy yet, Mike?"

Shayne smiled. "Not yet. At least I wasn't an hour ago, when I left the apartment."

Thinking of that reminded him that he had planned to call Phyllis as soon as he had talked to Sandra Van Ness. He nodded to the house detective and then went out into the lobby, heading for the row of phone booths behind a clump of the potted palms that gave the hotel its name.

He had reached a booth and shut the door behind him when his eye happened to fall on the elevators. The door of one of them opened, and Sandra Van Ness stepped out. She had donned a light jacket, and she was obviously on her way out of the hotel, but of more interest than that to Shayne were her companions.

A man walked beside her and held her arm. He was tall and well-dressed, with a swarthy face and sleek dark hair. He was saying something to Sandra, and when she laughed, he did, too. His smile reminded Shayne of a barracuda.

Walking behind the two of them were two more men, both bulky and stolid. And unless there was a new fashion that Shayne didn't know about, the bulges under their arms were guns.

He frowned. Sandra seemed to be going with them of her own free will, and yet something cried out to Shayne that all was not as it should be here. He glanced at the telephone. Phyllis had assured him that she would be all right, and he supposed he could wait to call her until he had checked this new development out. He opened the door of the booth and sidled out, ready to take up the trail of the girl and her unlikely escort.

But he still felt a slight pang of guilt and worry.

Any time now, the doctor had said.

III. THE WORKS

SANDRA VAN NESS AND THE THREE MEN were getting into a large car parked at the curb as Shayne sauntered out onto the sidewalk.

Shayne turned his back to them and walked casually toward the parking lot, but he had seen that Sandra and the dark man were getting into the back seat, the two gun-carriers into the front.

The car was a block up the street and heading north by the time Shayne got his roadster from the lot and fell in behind them. This was one time when the sparse traffic was a curse rather than a blessing. It made following someone unobtrusively just that much harder. Shayne had to hang several blocks back and hope that they didn't tumble to him.

The trail led northward, up the broad boulevard that paralleled the Beach. Soon, they left Hotel Row behind and passed through a section of massive homes that faced the water. It wasn't long before they were in the exclusive Bal Harbour district.

Shayne pulled over to the curb as he saw the car he was tailing pull into a driveway almost a quarter of a mile ahead. He set the brake and got out to close the distance on foot.

The driveway turned in through a gap in a high, dense hedge, and when Shayne got closer, he could see that a chain link fence was directly behind the hedge. Whoever the owner was, he liked his privacy. There were wrought-iron gates to close off the driveway, but they were open at the moment. Shayne jammed his hands in his pockets and strolled past the opening.

The grounds inside were large, the lawn green and well-tended, and the house sitting in the middle of it all was more of a mansion. Shayne walked on past, trying to figure out how to get inside the place without being noticed.

Just north of the property was another large estate, but there was a sign on the gate of this one declaring that it was for sale. Shayne glanced through the gate and saw that it looked deserted. He checked both ways, up and down the street, saw no cars in sight, and grabbed the bars of the gate. They were arranged well for climbing, and in less than sixty seconds he dropped to the ground on the other side.

The hedge that was out front also continued down the line between the two estates, and Shayne walked along it hurriedly. There was no chain link fence with this part of the hedge, and he finally found an opening big enough for him to wiggle through when he was down nearly to the beach. The hedge ended when it reached the sand, and he could have gone around the end of it, but this way might offer more concealment.

Sure enough, there were shrubs in abundance on the other side of the hedge, allowing him to make his zig-zag way toward the house with only a small chance of being seen. There was a garage at the side of the

house, and he saw the big car that he had tailed parked there.

He paused behind a particularly bushy shrub about thirty feet from the house and peered cautiously around it. He could see a large window, and through it, he could see Sandra Van Ness, moving around in the room inside. He couldn't see any of the others, but Sandra was speaking, so he assumed that at least one of them was in there with her.

The window was open slightly, and Shayne knew that if he could get underneath it, he could eavesdrop on the conversation. But there was that last thirty yards to cross, and there was no cover in that stretch. His only chance would be a straightahead sprint and the hope that no one would spot him.

He crouched, then burst from the shrub with a speed that belied his size. Ten yards passed under his feet, then fifteen, then —

"Hey! Grab that guy!"

One of the gunsel had emerged from the garage. Shayne didn't waste his breath cursing, though he certainly felt like it. Instead, he altered his course and headed directly for the man who had yelled.

The man was clawing under his coat for the gun Shayne had noticed earlier, but he only had it halfway out when the big redhead barreled into him. The impact knocked him backwards with a grunt, and one of Shayne's knobby fists cracked against his jaw.

Shayne had heard other footsteps behind him as he ran; and now he cast a glance over his shoulder, just in time to see his pursuer throw a punch. He moved his head and let the blow sail harmlessly by. Stepping inside the man's reach, Shayne peppered his belly with short, hard punches. The man gasped and started to fold up.

But the other one was back in the fight by then. Shayne heard movement behind him. He spun around to see that the man had finally gotten the gun out. Instead of firing it, he swung it viciously at Shayne. Shayne jerked his head, but the barrel clipped it anyway, with enough force to send his Panama flying and make sparks dance behind his eyes. Shayne felt a sudden burst of nausea churning inside him, and he swung wildly, trying to keep the man back.

His blows were too wild, though, and he saw the gun barrel flashing at him again. He tried to duck, but the earlier blow had slowed his reflexes. The gun thudding against his skull drove him to his knees.

The man stepped back out of Shayne's reach, breathing hard, and snapped, "All right, you bastard, you make one more move and I'll plant one right in your gut!"

Shayne shook his head, trying to dislodge the gremlins that were playing havoc with his brain. The man snorted and said, "Got knocked

silly, did you? Well, get up. We're going in the house and see what the boss wants done with you."

His face hard, Shayne got to his feet, trying to hide the pain his throbbing head was giving him. The second man had gotten his wind back by now, and he scooped up Shayne's hat, tossing it to the detective.

Prodded by the gun, Shayne went through the garage and into the lavishly furnished house. He wound up in a den that was ninety-five percent dark wood, with the man who undoubtedly owned the place facing him and glaring.

"What the hell is this?" he asked the men behind Shayne.

"We spotted him trying to sneak up on the house," the man with the gun said. "You think some of the competition hired him, boss?"

The man looked Shayne up and down and then sneered. "None of 'em are that dumb. What about it, pal! Who are you, and what are you doing messing around my house?"

A slight movement caught Shayne's eye, and he looked over to see that the door into the den was open a crack. An idea popped into his head.

He returned the dark man's look glare for glare and said, "My name is Michael Shayne. I'm a private investigator."

The man's eyebrows raised. "What the hell does a peeper want with me?"

"It's not you I'm interested in," Shayne said. "It's the young lady over there."

He heard a quick intake of breath from the other side of the door. The man shot a glance in that direction, then said wearily, "Come on in, Sandra. I thought I told you to wait in the other room."

The door opened and Sandra Van Ness entered, a sheepish look on her face. She said, "I just wanted to see what all the commotion was about."

"It was about this guy here. Now, what do you know about him? He says he was following you."

Sandra's eyes wouldn't meet Shayne's. She looked at the floor and said, "He's some sort of private detective. I think he's looking for that kid who's been bothering me, you know, that soldier. I think he said something about the soldier being missing."

The man turned his agate eyes back toward Shayne. "Is that true, shamus?"

Shayne's mouth twisted in a grimace of disgust. "Hell, how was I to know she'd believe everything I told her. Listen, I was hired by the lady's father, to check out her acquaintances and find out if she was in

with the wrong crowd."

"That's not true!" Sandra exclaimed. "Daddy wouldn't do that."

"Maybe you don't have your daddy quite figured out after all, Miss Van Ness," Shayne said. He turned back to the dark man and went on, "I fed her a cock-and-bull story about that GI so that I could get a line on how she really felt about him and also so that I could find out if she was involved with anybody else."

"She is," the man said. "Now what's this about the soldier being missing?"

Shayne shrugged. "Maybe he is. I sure as hell wouldn't know. I made the whole thing up, to test her reactions. I don't mind telling you, bud, her parents like that soldier. They think that somebody like him would be just the right thing to settle their daughter down."

"It's all a pack of disgusting lies," Sandra hissed. "Surely you don't believe him?"

The man turned a speculative gaze on Shayne. "I'm not sure," he said slowly. "A story that wacky just might be true. I know your father isn't too crazy about the two of us having some laughs together. He might pull a stunt like this." He frowned. "If I let you go, Shayne, what are you going to tell the old man?"

Shayne glanced around at the hostile faces, licked his lips, and looked nervous. "That I've decided that what his daughter does is her own damn business."

The man reached up and patted Shayne's cheek lightly. "Now that's being a smart shamus." He took out a wallet and extracted a hundred dollar bill from it. Folding it, he tucked the bill in Shayne's shirt pocket. "That's for being smart. I've never thought that intelligence was its own reward. And just to be sure that you keep on being smart and that you don't ever bother me or the lady again . . ." He motioned curtly. "The works, boys."

Shayne heard satisfied grunts behind him, and he knew he'd better duck.

He was too late.

A fist slammed into the back of his neck. He tried to turn around and put up some kind of a fight. He dodged the next blow and threw a punch of his own, feeling with satisfaction the way his fist sank almost to the wrist in a soft stomach. But then the other one hit him in the head again, and he felt himself spinning out of control. The floor jumped up and smacked him in the face. He heard the girl let out a stifled scream.

And then feet were crashing into him. He tried to ride with the kicks and wound up flopping like a fish. His energy finally ran out, and long

after he stopped feeling the kicks, he could still hear the soggy thuds as they landed.

It was the last thing he remembered for a while.

IV. PROMISE TO AN ANGEL

THE FIRST THING HE HEARD when he regained consciousness was the waves.

Shayne kept his eyes closed and tried to take stock of his situation. He was sitting up, his head lolled back against something, and he realized within seconds that he was in the front seat of a car. A warm breeze was blowing against the left side of his face, so the window was down, and the sound of the waves washing in was coming from that direction as well. Shayne forced his eyes open then and took a look around.

He was in his own roadster, it was parked by the side of the road. He recognized the boulevard, and he could see the rising towers of the Beach hotels a mile or two ahead. Next to the car was a vacant lot, overgrown with grass and weeds, and beyond it was the ocean.

Shayne rubbed a hand over his face, wincing as he touched sore spots. Blood from a cut just in front of his left ear had dried on his skin. He twisted the rearview mirror around and saw that it was the only mark on his face besides a slight bruise.

His torso was a different story, though. He probed at it gingerly and took several deep breaths. There were no sharp pains, which meant he was lucky. No broken ribs. Just a dull ache that covered most of his chest and back. He was going to be black and blue, that was for sure.

He felt something crinkle in his shirt pocket and reached to see what it was. A grim smile tugged the corners of his mouth up as he pulled out the folded hundred dollar bill that the dark man had put there. Shayne knew that he had been paid off, both in cash and in violence. The man was in for a surprise when he found that the bribe and the beating hadn't done their job.

Shayne had a score to settle with him now, and Shayne always paid his debts.

He checked his watch. It was still running, and if it was correct, then he hadn't been out long. It had been only a half hour since the two gunsel's had grabbed him.

His hat was on the seat beside him. He settled it on his head and then pressed the starter. The roadster came to life. Shayne pointed it south.

There was no way of knowing for sure whether the man back at the mansion had believed his story about being hired by Sandra's father or

not. Even if he didn't, he probably thought Shayne was scared off good and proper. Shayne had tried to give that impression. In truth, though, he had only begun, and he was more curious than ever now about Sandra Van Ness and her relationship with Jerry Briggs. He also wondered how she had gotten mixed up with a man who seemed to be a definite hoodlum.

The man was ruthless, there was no doubt about that. Was he ruthless enough to dispose of a young soldier making a play for his girl-friend?

That was a question to ponder, Shayne decided. As he drove, he dug a cigarette out of the pack in his pocket and lit it, inhaling the smoke gratefully. His head began to clear a little bit, and he knew that if he had a quick sidecar of Martell, he'd feel almost human again.

Then a sudden realization hit him, and he could have kicked himself. He had forgotten all about calling Phyllis to make sure she was all right.

A gas station came up on his right, with a pay phone inside. Shayne pulled off the road and parked on the edge of the apron, out of the way, although the station wasn't busy. Gas coupons made sure of that.

"Need to use your phone, buddy," Shayne said to the attendant as he entered the office. The middle-aged man waved to the instrument on the wall.

Shayne shoved a nickel into it and rapidly dialed the number of his apartment hotel. When the desk clerk answered, he said, "This is Mike Shayne, Fred. Ring my apartment for me, will you?"

The clerk hesitated, then said, "Sure thing, Mr. Shayne, but . . . there's nobody up there right now."

Shayne felt his fingers tightening on the receiver. "What?"

"Mrs. Shayne's not there, sir. She had me call a cab for her a little while ago, and when she came down to leave, she said to tell you that she had gone to the hospital. Gee, I hope everything's okay, Mr. Shayne."

Shayne felt strangely numb. His pulse had quickened, and his breathing was deeper. He said quietly, "Thanks, Fred. I appreciate you helping her." He hung up and caught himself pulling at his earlobe, not in concentration this time, but rather in agitation.

The hospital! That meant it was time. Phyllis had ridden down to the hospital by herself, in a taxicab, for God's sake! As the station attendant watched in confusion, Shayne whirled around and almost ran back to his car.

He would never forgive himself if he missed the birth of his first child. And it could all be over by now. Lord, he hoped Phyllis was all right.

Slamming the roadster into gear, he pulled out onto the road and headed directly for the County Causeway. He cursed himself roundly as he drove, recalling the words of the doctor who had speculated that perhaps Phyllis was a little too slim to have children easily. He should have stayed with her and not taken this case, Shayne told himself. He never should have listened to her.

As he crossed Biscayne Bay, Shayne began to get control of his raging emotions. Self-recrimination wouldn't help a thing. What he had to do now was calm down so that he could get to the hospital as fast as possible without wrecking his car.

He made record time to the hospital. When he strode swiftly into the lobby, some of the people inside probably thought he was the one needing the attention, what with the cut and the bruise on his face. He put his palms on the reception desk and said to the pretty girl behind it, "My wife's having a baby here. Where can I find her?"

"The maternity ward and the delivery room are on the third floor, sir. Could I ask you name, sir? Sir?"

It was too late. Shayne was already heading for the elevators.

When he reached the third floor, he stepped into a sterile-appearing white corridor. A sign with an arrow on it told him that the delivery room and the waiting room were down the hall. He walked quickly in that direction, reflecting irrelevantly that he had never liked the smell of hospitals.

He slapped the swinging doors of the waiting room open and stalked in. Two extremely nervous fathers-to-be who were sitting in straight chairs jumped. There was a Dutch door on the other side of the room, with the top half open, and a nurse stood on the other side. She gave Shayne a hard stare, disapproving of his entrance.

"Shayne," he told her brusquely. "My wife is having a baby."

Her expression softened somewhat. She consulted a clipboard and then asked, "Phyllis Shayne?"

"That's right."

"Her doctor would like to see you, Mr. Shayne. He's in the doctor's lounge, just down the hall. Room 323."

Shayne felt a pang of fear go through him. In a voice he hardly recognized as belonging to him, he asked, "What about my wife?"

"I'm sure the doctor can answer all of your questions, Mr. Shayne."

He spun on his heel and hurried back out, rattling the other two men who were standing their vigil again. It only took him a moment to

locate Room 323. He entered without knocking.

The only occupant of the room sat on a battered sofa, legs stretched out in front of him, smoking a cigarette. He had gray hair and a small moustache of the same color, and he wore hospital whites. He looked up at Shayne's entrance and said calmly, "Hello, Michael."

Shayne didn't waste any words. "Phyllis?"

The doctor nodded. "She's fine, right at the moment. I had her taken back to her room."

"The baby?"

"Not yet." The doctor blew a cloud of smoke toward the ceiling. "The contractions have eased up, Mike. I'm afraid it may be a while yet."

Shayne heaved a deep sigh. "Oh, Lord."

"Now don't start worrying. Phyllis may have a long, hard time of it, but there's no reason for undue concern right now. All we can do is wait."

"Can I see her?"

"I think so, for a minute." The doctor stood up. "Come on."

PHYLLIS LOOKED BEAUTIFUL, AS SHE ALWAYS DID. Her eyes were closed, and she was breathing easily. She was pale, but the whiteness of her skin only made for a more striking contrast with her raven hair. As Shayne gazed down at her tenderly, he thought that there had never been a time since he had known her when she wasn't lovely. From the time of their first meeting, when she had been a terrified young heiress and he a mercenary, slightly disreputable private shamus. The months since then had changed both of them, and both of them had grown, but Phyllis was still the loveliest woman Shayne had ever seen.

She must have sensed his presence, because her eyelids flickered open, and a slow smile curved her lips. In a soft voice, she said, "Hello, Michael."

"Hello, Angel," he whispered, taking her small hand in his two big ones. "How are you, Phyl?"

"Oh, I'm fine," she said sleepily. "I wish Michael, Jr. down there would hurry up, that's all. I want you to see your son."

"I'll see him soon enough," Shayne said gently. "You just take it easy."

"What about . . . the case?"

"Now, don't worry about that. Giving birth is a big enough job. You don't need to worry about being an assistant detective." He was glad

he had paused long enough to find a restroom and get the blood off his face.

Phyllis' slender fingers tightened around his rough ones. "No," she said. "I want to know. After all . . . you took it . . . because of me."

Shayne debated rapidly. He didn't want her worrying about the details of the case, which suddenly seemed not nearly as important to him, but then again it might give her something else to think about. Keeping her mind off the difficult labor she was going through might be a good thing.

"The case is going fine," he said. "I think I've got a lead to Jerry Briggs. I've been checking up on the girl he was interested in."

"Good. Good place to start, with a girl. Isn't that the way . . . a lot of cases are?"

"That's right, Angel."

She got a determined look on her face, and there was more strength in her voice when she spoke again. "Listen, Michael, the doctor says it may be a long time yet. I don't want you hanging around here. You get out and work! You find out what happened to that soldier, all right?"

"Sure, Phyl, I will."

"No, I mean it, Michael. I want you to promise me. You can keep in touch with the hospital and get right back here when I go into the delivery room again, but there's no point in you sitting here watching me doze."

Shayne swallowed. "All right, Angel. I promise. I'll get back to work."

She rested her head back on the pillow. "That's good, Michael. Wish I wasn't so groggy . . . Wish . . ."

Her eyes closed. Shayne leaned over and brushed her lips with his.

When he went back out into the hall a moment later, he saw a beefy, thick-bodied figure striding down it. The redfaced man had an unlit cigar in his mouth, and he made directly for Shayne.

"Hello, Mike," Will Gentry said. He was chief of the Miami Police Department detective bureau, and an old and good friend. "How's Phyllis. You a proud papa yet?"

"Not yet," Shayne said. "The doctor says labor may last a long time with Phyllis. How the hell did you find out about it?"

"I called your place to see how things were going. The desk clerk told me Phyllis had gone to the hospital. I thought I'd come down and keep you company."

"I appreciate it, Will. And I'm glad you're here. I've got a question for you. Do you make a guy who lives over in Bal Harbour, late thirties,

dark hair, swarthy, carries a couple of torpedoes with him?"

Gentry frowned and shook his head. "Not right off hand. What do you need to know for?"

Shayne ignored Gentry's question and asked another one of his own. "What if I can give you the license number of his car?"

"I can find out who it's registered to, you know that."

Shayne concentrated for a few seconds and pulled the number of the big car out of his memory. He gave it to an obviously baffled Gentry, and the detective chief said, "Let's find a phone."

The closest telephone was in the lobby downstairs, and after a few minutes on it, Gentry turned to Shayne and said, "That car belongs to Anton Dravec. I remember him now, and he fits the description you gave me. Mike, what the hell are you up to?"

"Tell me about Dravec first. Is he a hood?"

"He was before he came over to the States. He's kept his nose clean over here, at least as far as we can prove, although the grapevine says he moved right in here, working the numbers and protection rackets, mostly."

"Where's he from originally?"

"I believe he's Rumanian, or some such. He came to the States from Germany, though, and that's where he was a wheel in the underworld. I've heard he made a fortune working round the docks in Hamburg, bringing in drugs."

Shayne scratched his jaw. "Came over from Germany, huh?"

"That's right, not long after Hitler and his joyboys took over. Dravec's not Jewish, but he still doesn't fit the Aryan mold. You know the Nazis came down pretty hard on the German gangs anyway."

"But you don't have anything on him since he migrated?"

"Nothing but speculation. Dammit, Mike, are you working on a case?" Gentry had trouble keeping his voice down to an acceptable level for a hospital.

"Yeah, Will, I am. In fact, I've got to go do some more work on it right now."

Gentry looked flabbergasted. "You mean you're going to leave your wife while she's in labor?"

Shayne smiled, but his eyes were bleak. "That's right, Will. I may not like it, but I made a promise."

V. NO ACCIDENT

SHAYNE RETRIEVED HIS ROADSTER from the hospital parking lot and pointed it toward the offices of the *Miami Daily News*. As he

drove, he tried to put Phyllis and her situation out of his mind, with little success. He kept seeing in his mind's eye how she looked, lying there so pale. He found himself wishing that he hadn't made the promise to her, but that didn't change the fact that he had. He wasn't in the habit of breaking promises to her, and he wasn't going to start now.

That meant finding out what had happened to the missing Jerry Briggs. Shayne had a theory about that.

He parked down the block from the *News* building. Nodding to the guard at the door, Shayne went into the lobby, but instead of heading for the stairs to the City Room on the second floor, where he usually met Tim Rourke, he went down to the basement, where he found an elderly lady sitting just inside the file room, knitting what looked like a sweater.

Shayne gave her a smile and said, "How's things in the morgue these days?"

"Same as usual, Mike," she said, never taking her eyes off of her knitting. "What are you looking for?"

"The society pages, probably. Do you remember seeing anything about a girl named Sandra Van Ness? She's staying over on the Beach with her parents. The family has money, and they're down here for the season."

The elderly woman nodded. "I've seen her picture. She's a one-girl party, from what I've read. Her boyfriend is one of those foreign fellows, but I can't recall his name."

"You don't mean to tell me that your memory is slipping?"

"Go on with you, Michael Shayne. You know I'm getting on in years now. I can't remember everything."

Just damn near everything, Shayne thought admiringly. She read every word of every paper that went into the files she watched over, and most of the information in them lodged in her remarkable brain. Shayne had thought more than once that she was the perfect choice to be in charge of the *News* morgue.

He spent a half hour going through the society pages for the last few months, finding quite a few pictures and stories that featured Sandra Van Ness. She was a natural source of copy, being both beautiful and rich. Quite a few of the pictures showed her in the company of the man whom Will Gentry had identified as Anton Dravec . . . the man who had ordered Shayne beaten.

That was what he was looking for, proof positive of a well-established relationship between the society girl and the European gang leader. He leaned back in the straight chair he was using and

tugged worriedly on his ear. The thoughts that were running through his head didn't bode well for a young GI named Jerry Briggs.

Dravec was arrogant, cruel, and ruthless. Shayne had seen first-hand proof of that. He would probably consider any girl that he had on the string, like Sandra Van Ness, to be his property, and he wouldn't like it if someone like Jerry Briggs started trying to make time with the girl. The question was, what would he do about it?

Shayne thought he knew the answer, even though he didn't have any concrete evidence yet.

He put the papers he had been consulting back in the files where they belonged, the went past the lady at the door with a thank you. She held up the sweater and said, "For my boy in the North Atlantic."

"I hear it gets cold there," Shayne said. "He'll like it."

He hoped he wouldn't run into Rourke on the way out of the building. The lanky newshound would want to know what he was doing, and once Rourke smelled a story it took a lot to shake him loose.

Shayne made it back to his car without seeing Rourke, then headed south. The Richmond Lighter-Than-Air Station was a few miles outside of Miami. Shayne knew that the Army Air Corps used it as a headquarters for the blimps that flew observation patrols over the shipping lanes. It hadn't been too long, in fact, since a German U-boat had shot down one of the blimps.

It was time, Shayne had decided, to discuss his theory with Harvey Sheppard. Sheppard might well want to call in the Military Police after all, in light of what Shayne had discovered. It was possible that the MP's, with the weight of the government behind them, could accomplish more than Shayne could on his own.

It was late afternoon by now, and Shayne stopped at a roadside diner briefly to grab a bite to eat and to call the hospital from the pay phone. As he munched a hamburger, a nurse told him over the phone that Mrs. Shayne's condition was unchanged.

The hamburger landed in his stomach like it was made out of lead.

Worrying wouldn't do any good, Shayne told himself. He would call again when he reached the base.

It didn't take long to get there. As usual, Shayne's instincts told him to open up the throttle of the roadster; as he had always done before the War, but he controlled it and kept the speedometer needle at thirty-five.

The sun was lowering in the west when he spotted the hangars at the base. The huge structures loomed up against the sky like monoliths. Shayne saw one of the blimps descending softly and gracefully toward the field. When it was down, it would be taken into one of the giant

hangars. Shayne recalled Rourke telling him about the time a low-floating cloud had drifted into one of the hangars, causing an indoor hailstorm. Shayne hadn't really believed him at the time, but now that he could see them in person, he was a little more inclined to give the story credence.

A high fence, topped with barbed wire, surrounded the base. There was a gatehouse guarding the entrance where a blacktop road led into the area. Shayne pulled up beside it and rolled down his window to the guard who stepped out of the little cubicle. The young man wore a helmet and carried a rifle, and while he was polite enough, he was also wary.

Shayne identified himself and then said, "I'd like to see a soldier named Harvey Sheppard. He's a private, I think, and he works in the records office."

The guard's eyes narrowed at the mention of Sheppard's name, but he said, "You'll want to see Major Nicholson first, sir. His office is in that first building on your left."

"Thanks, son," Shayne said, engaging the gears of the roadster and letting it roll toward the building which the guard had pointed out. He didn't know why he had to see this Major Nicholson first, but he knew that going through channels was a necessary evil when it came to dealing with the military.

Shayne parked in front of the building and went in to find another young man hesitantly pecking on a typewriter. When the typist looked up, glad of an excuse to take a break, Shayne said, "I'm supposed to see Major Nicholson. My name is Mike Shayne, and it's about Private Harvey Sheppard."

"Yes, sir," the young man nodded. Like the one on the gate, this one looked a little surprised when Shayne mentioned Harvey Sheppard. "Right down the hall, sir. Major Nicholson's office is Room 8."

"Thanks." Shayne was starting to get the feeling that something was wrong here.

That feeling intensified when he saw that the door to Room 8 was labeled COMMANDING OFFICER, MILITARY POLICE. This Major Nicholson must be in charge of the MP's here at the base, and Shayne didn't know why he had been sent here, unless they had discovered that Briggs was missing and had taken over the case.

He rapped his knuckles on the door and was told by a voice on the other side to come in. When Shayne stepped inside the office, a man behind a desk looked up at him. He wore a major's uniform and was younger than Shayne would have expected, with an open face and blond hair. He said, "Can I help you?"

"My name is Mike Shayne. I'm here to see Private Harvey Sheppard, and I was told I had to see you first."

Major Nicholson sat up straighter, and Shayne again had that uncomfortable feeling that something was wrong. Nicholson said, "Do you have business with Private Sheppard, Mr. Shayne?"

"That's right," Shayne grunted. "I'm a private detective in Miami, Major, and Sheppard hired me this afternoon."

"Do you mind if I ask why Private Sheppard hired you?"

"Yes, I do." Shayne respected the military, but he wasn't going to treat it with kid gloves. "I can't divulge that information without an okay from my client."

"That's going to be a little difficult," Nicholson said with a grimace. "Private Sheppard is dead."

Shayne confined his surprised reaction to a frown, but inside, he was shaken. "What happened?" he said. "Was there an accident?"

"Murder is no accident," Nicholson said. "Private Sheppard was shot in Miami this afternoon. He was walking along Twelfth Street about three o'clock when someone in a passing car shot him three times. All the witnesses were too far away to get the license number of the car, and their descriptions were sketchy. I'm in charge of the investigation, in cooperation with the Miami police; of course, and I don't mind telling you, Mr. Shayne, it doesn't look promising. We need more information if we're going to solve this. Now . . . do you still want to keep Sheppard's reasons for hiring you a secret?"

Shayne hadn't expected anything like this. He considered for a moment, then asked, "You don't have any leads?"

"Not yet. Sheppard was well-liked here on the base, and I have a hunch that there aren't any other military personnel involved. I think the whole thing stems from something outside. And that's where you come in, Shayne."

Shayne frowned and rubbed his jaw. Harvey Sheppard had seemed like a nice young man, and Shayne had a feeling that his murder had something to do with the disappearance of Jerry Briggs. He knew from the time and place of the shooting that it had to have occurred not long after Sheppard had left the apartment. It could be that someone had seen him visiting Shayne and had decided that they didn't want him poking around in the disappearance of his friend. That could mean Dravec or his men were responsible for the killing, if Shayne's speculations had been correct.

But if that was the case, Dravec would never have believed the story Shayne had spun about being hired by Sandra Van Ness' father. If Dravec had killed Sheppard in order to forestall an investigation, he

would have done the same thing to Shayne. It looked like there could be another party involved who had something to do with the vanished Jerry Briggs.

Those thoughts went through Shayne's head in a split-second leaving him with the conclusion that there was more to this case than he had thought. Nicholson was looking at him expectantly, and after a second more of thought, Shayne said, "What do you know about another private named Jerry Briggs?"

Nicholson shook his head. "Nothing. Should I know something about him?"

"He's been missing since yesterday, and he was Sheppard's buddy. That's why Sheppard hired me, to find Briggs."

A frown appeared on Nicholson's face. "If this Briggs has been gone since yesterday, he should have been listed as AWOL. But I don't recall it."

"That's one reason Sheppard was worried about him."

"I'll check on it. There must have been a foul-up in the paperwork somewhere. A snafu, I think they're calling it now. But in the meantime, suppose you fill me in on what you've found out."

Shayne laid out the details of the case so far, somewhat reluctantly. He had always worked better alone; that was one of the reasons he had quit as an operative for a large detective agency in New York a few years before, preferring to open his own office. But under the circumstances, he supposed it would be better to cooperate with Nicholson and the Army. For one thing, they might not let him off the base if he didn't.

Nicholson made copious notes while Shayne talked. The officer's whole manner struck Shayne as brisk and efficient. When Shayne had finished talking, Nicholson said, "We'll take it from here, Mr. Shayne. The first thing we'll do is check out this Dravec character."

Nicholson hadn't come to the same conclusions as Shayne had, the detective could tell that much, but Shayne wasn't going to do the man's thinking for him. And he didn't intend to give up the case as Nicholson was intimating he should. He would have to keep giving this case his maximum effort, in order to satisfy the demands of the promise he had made to Phyllis. She might not understand if he told her that he had turned it over to the Army to solve.

That reminded him. "Can I use your phone?" he asked the MP major.

"Of course."

Shayne dialed the hospital quickly and listened to the same nurse tell him that Phyllis had started contractions again. His fingers

tightened on the receiver, and he asked in a harsh voice, "Is she going back in again?"

"Yes, sir," the nurse told him. "She should be going to the delivery room any time now."

Shayne thanked her and hung up. Nicholson had been openly watching him, and now the major said, "It sounds like you've got other things to worry about, Mr. Shayne, besides this case."

"Yeah," Shayne grunted. "I'll be in touch, Major."

"So will I, Mr. Shayne."

Shayne left the base rapidly. The first stars were starting to come out. And going back into Miami, there was no way the speedometer needle was going to stay at thirty-five.

VI. MORE QUESTIONS

SHAYNE WAS ABOUT HALFWAY BACK TO TOWN when he saw the headlights coming up behind him. Despite the emotional upheaval he was going through and the confusing details of the case that filled his brain, he was still watchful, and he noticed right away that the lights were gaining on him.

He checked his speedometer. The roadster was pushing seventy, which was just about the limit of its speed, but the other car kept closing the gap. Shayne felt a tiny prickle on the back of his neck. He reached over and took a well-cared-for .38 out of the glove compartment.

As he pushed the accelerator to the floor, the roadster gained a little more speed on the sparsely-travelled highway. Still the other car continued to overtake him. Shayne began to slow down and pulled over to the right as far as he could to see if the other car would pass him.

It roared up behind him and then swung out as if to pass. Shayne's hands were wrapped tightly around the steering wheel, and that was all that saved him when the other car suddenly swerved toward him. He jerked the wheel savagely and sent the roadster plunging off the roadway.

There was a slight embankment on this side of the road, and Shayne's car went down it like a bucking bronco. It took all his strength to fight the wheel and keep the vehicle going in a relatively straight line. He thought for a second that it was going to tip over, but he worked the brakes expertly and after a few wild seconds that seemed much longer, brought the car to a stop several yards off the road.

The other car had stopped also, on the shoulder of the highway, and as Shayne shook his head to clear it, he saw two men leaping from the

car and running toward him. He grabbed for the .38.

It wasn't there.

Shayne barked, "Dammit!" The gun must have fallen off the seat during the plunge down the embankment and landed somewhere in the floorboards. The shadows of the oncoming evening had grown thick enough so that Shayne couldn't see the gun. He heard the pounding footsteps of the men coming closer.

He levered his door open and uncoiled himself from the seat. They would expect him to be shaken up by the near-accident. Well, he was, but he wasn't going to let that slow him down. As the men ran up to the car, Shayne launched himself from the running board at them.

They hadn't expected that move, all right. He got a hand on the throat of one of them and pulled him along as he barreled into the other one, driving his shoulder into the man's belly. All three of them wound up on the sandy ground.

Shayne rolled, came up crouching, and drove a big foot into the chest of one of the men as he tried to get up. He could still see well enough in the dusk to be able to tell that these weren't the men who had grabbed him at Dravec's earlier. Maybe they worked for the other person that Shayne suspected must be taking an interest in the case. Whatever, there wasn't much time to ponder the questions. The two men were getting to their feet again and preparing to charge Shayne. Neither one of them looked too happy.

They jumped him at the same time. He ducked the punch of one of them and hit the other in the stomach, then pivoted to chop a fist in the first one's face. They fell back, but only for a second, and then they resumed the attack.

Shayne put up a good fight, but the odds were against him. Not only were they two to his one, but they were burly and knew how to fight. He was still sore from the beating inflicted earlier by Dravec's men. And even as he struggled, he couldn't forget the fact that Phyllis was probably in the delivery room at that very instant. It was no wonder that after a few minutes, his guard slipped and a fist crashed into his face, knocking him backwards. Before he could recover, they were all over him, and he went down.

"That's enough," a voice barked. "Hold him down, but don't knock him out. We need him able to talk."

Shayne's shoulders were pinned by the two men, one on each side of him. A third man walked up to them briskly and looked down at Shayne, his face a mixture of anger and suspicion. He was tall and well-built, in his late thirties perhaps, with dark hair touched with gray. He wore a blue double-breasted suit, and under other circum-

stances, he might have reminded Shayne of a successful insurance salesman. No gladhander was ever so grimfaced as this man, though, or handled a gun so easily and confidently. The man leveled a .45 automatic at Shayne and said, "We'll let you up now, but don't try anything. I'll shoot if I have to, Shayne, and you'd better believe it."

The two burly men released Shayne's shoulders and stood up, stepping back away from him. Shayne sat up and glared at his captors. He was getting damned sick and tired of being jumped.

"All right, get on with it," he growled. "Are you going to shoot me like you did to Sheppard, or just try to scare me to death?"

The man with the gun moved slightly in surprise. "What do you know about Sheppard?" he asked.

"I know that some bastard gunned him down. Anything else is none of your damned business." Shayne wished that he felt as tough as he was talking. In the back of his mind was the sudden fear that Phyllis and their child would have to go through life without a husband and father. He could feel death in the air.

"This is no game, Shayne," the man said slowly. "We know you're a private dick, and we know Sheppard came to see you. Was it about Briggs? What did he tell you?"

That clinched it. Shayne was sure now that these were the ones who were responsible for Sheppard's murder. It looked like he may have been wrong about Dravec. Maybe Briggs had been mixed up in something much more sinister than making a play for somebody else's girl.

Shayne kept his mouth clamped tightly shut. Despite the special circumstances, despite his overriding worry about Phyllis, he had never been the type to spill his guts on command, and he was not going to start now.

One of the other men cursed and said, "Look, Ott, there's one of the blimps going out on patrol. Can they spot us down here?"

Ott was the one with the gun, and he glanced furiously at the other man as if he was angry about the mention of his name. The blimp was visible against the afterglow from the sunset as it floated high overhead. Ott snapped, "No, they can't see — "

Shayne didn't give a damn what they could see. He saw that Ott's attention had wavered, and he moved.

Shayne went to his right in a sudden dive, knocking the legs out from under one of the men. As the man spilled with a yell, Shayne rolled again, lashing out and up with a foot. His brogan connected with Ott's wrist, and the gun went flying off into the shadows. Ott shouted. "Get him!"

But Shayne had his hands and knees under him by then, and he came to his feet and swung a rock-hard fist in one smooth motion. The fist cracked against the second man's jaw and sent him sprawling on the sand.

Ott jumped toward Shayne, but he didn't expect the big man to move so fast. Shayne avoided his lunge and hooked a fist to Ott's midsection, driving the air out of his lungs sharply. Ott doubled over, gasping.

The first man Shayne had knocked down ran into a blurring left-right combination as he tried to get up. He stretched out on the ground again, twitching slightly before unconsciousness claimed him.

Ott and the other man were groggy, but they were still able to scramble around looking for the fallen gun. Shayne scooped his battered Panama off the ground and ran back to his car. He hit the starter and listened impatiently to the grinding of the engine for a few long seconds before it caught. Then he pulled out carefully, in order to keep from bogging down in the soft ground. He piloted the roadster back up onto the road.

Ott had found the gun by now and called out, "Hold it, Shayne!" Shayne slipped out of his car, leaving the motor running, and raised the hood of the other car. He jerked a handful of wires loose as the gun cracked and a bullet spanged off the hood. Shayne dove back in his own car, put it in gear, and took off toward Miami, head down. The sound of Ott's futile yelling and shooting died out in seconds.

Shayne still wasn't sure what was going on, but he wished that Hell had picked a better time to start popping!

VII. A MAN IN UNIFORM

AN HOUR LATER, A VERY ANGRY MICHAEL SHAYNE was stalking out of the hospital. Anyone who was in his way got out of it in a hurry, once they saw his face. All they could see was the anger on his face. They couldn't see the frustration and anxiety underneath it.

He jerked open the door of his car and slid in behind the wheel, then muttered to himself, "All night! Dammit, I thought having a baby was simple. How can it take all night!"

And yet that was what the doctor had said, that Phyllis was likely to be in labor for another eight to ten hours, or longer. It was still nothing to worry about, he had assured Shayne, but Shayne was worried. Badly worried.

The doctor had also advised him to go home and get some rest, told him that there was nothing he could do there at the hospital. But he couldn't go home and stare at the walls of the apartment,

Shayne knew.

That left sitting in the hospital and going slowly mad, or getting out and doing something for a few hours. That meant working on the case. Shayne started the roadster and pulled out of the lot.

Despite the sudden appearance of Ott and his men in the case, Shayne wasn't fully convinced that Dravec was in the clear. Until all the facts were in his possession, he couldn't be sure of anything. He had been mixed up in cases before where people did things that didn't seem to make sense, only to find out later that they had very good reasons for their actions. At any rate, Shayne felt like Anton Dravec deserved a return visit. Besides, there was still the matter of that beating Dravec had ordered . . .

He crossed the Bay and headed north for Bal Harbour. The last light of day was gone, and Miami Beach was eerily dark, especially when Shayne compared it to the days before the War, when the Magic City had blazed with light all night long. There had been reports of German subs as close as a mile or two offshore, though, and no one wanted to tempt an attack. Anyway, Shayne knew, the night life still went on, only it was behind blackout curtains now.

Most of the streetlights in Bal Harbour were turned off, and it took Shayne a little while to locate Dravec's house when he got there. When he did find it, he parked a couple of hundred yards away and approached the place on foot again. He took the same route into the grounds that he had that afternoon, moving even more cautiously this time, even though it was dark now. He didn't plan on being spotted again.

There were few lights visible in the house, but one of them was in the window under which Shayne had planned to eavesdrop on his previous visit. He made for it again, and this time as he hurried across the open spaces, there was no outcry or alarm. Silently, he made it to the window and crouched under it.

He heard the clinking sound of drinks being poured, then Dravec said, "I don't think we have anything to worry about. I'm sure everything will go off on schedule."

Another man said something then, but his voice was so soft that Shayne couldn't recognize it or distinguish what it said.

Dravec went on, "I wish I had known what Shayne was really up to when he was here this afternoon. He wouldn't have ever left here alive. I'm glad you came by to fill me in on everything."

The object of the discussion grinned savagely outside. He was pressed up against the side of the house, listening intently, but when the second man answered Dravec, he still couldn't identify his voice.

"Of course, I'm concerned," Dravec said sharply. "But Briggs and Sheppard are both taken care of, and Shayne won't find out enough to stop us in time. By this time tomorrow, the plan will have reached its culmination. You're sure the pilot doesn't suspect the truth?"

The other man murmured assent.

"And the bomb is ready, I know. I've taken care of that."

Shayne's jaw had tightened as Dravec spoke. It sounded like this case was taking on even more ramifications. Earlier in the day, he had thought he was dealing with a disappearance and a possible murder motivated by jealousy. It looked like he had been wrong. Dravec talked like Briggs was dead, as well as Sheppard, and this talk of plans and bombs meant one thing to Shayne —

Sabotage.

It made sense. If Dravec was a saboteur, and if Briggs had stumbled over his plans, the former gang lord would have no doubt eliminated the young soldier. Dravec's partner, the man he was talking to now, must have been watching Sheppard, just in case the GI decided to look into his friend's absence. When Sheppard visited Shayne, he had signed his own death warrant.

Shayne slipped his hat off and eased an eye past the side of the window, just enough to give him a partial view of the room. What he saw explained why he could hear Dravec plainly but not the other man. Dravec was standing, a drink in his hand, facing the window obliquely. The other man was in a deep armchair, facing away from the window. Shayne could see his feet and legs, but that was all.

He was sure it was the man called Ott, though, and the main question now was what did he and Dravec plan to blow up? Shayne ducked back away from the window as Dravec turned more in that direction. He quickly considered what he should do next. He supposed the smart thing to do would be to get out of there, find a phone, and call Major Nicholson. Once Shayne had told what he had just overheard, he was sure the Army would swoop down on this place like it was an enemy bunker. Which it was in a way, he supposed.

But that wouldn't ease any of the anger and frustration he felt. Sheppard had come to him for help, then left the apartment to run into a hail of bullets. Even though there was nothing he could have done to prevent it, Shayne didn't like it when his clients got themselves killed. It would be a lot more satisfying to go in there and clean up this nest of rats himself . . .

The decision was suddenly out of his hands. A flashlight snapped on, its beam pinning him to the wall, and a voice shouted, "Goddam it, it's him again!"

His muscles galvanized by the shout, Shayne threw himself out of the light. He had retrieved his .38 from the floor of his roadster earlier and stowed it in his pocket, and now he slapped for it as he rolled over the lawn, seeking some cover. The light followed him, picked him up again, and a gun blasted, the slug plowing a furrow in the turf beside him.

Shayne jerked his gun out and returned the fire. He heard shouting in the house. One of his slugs must have found a target, because there was a pained cry and the light went spinning away. In darkness again, Shayne sprinted for the cover of the trees.

He crouched behind one, trying to squeeze as much of his big rangy frame behind it as possible while he caught his breath. There was the slamming of doors in the house, and then he saw headlights flare in the garage. A car came shooting out, a different one from the vehicle Shayne had seen there earlier in the day, and he could make out a figure hunched over the wheel. The lights from the dashboard didn't give much illumination, but as the car roared past his hiding place, Shayne could see enough to make his blood run cold. The man driving the car wore the uniform of a United States Army officer. Shayne couldn't see his face, but the jacket and cap were unmistakable. He pumped three shots after it.

Ott was desperate to escape, though, and Shayne could see why. The man was a traitor, and it would mean death by a firing squad in all likelihood if he was caught here and exposed as part of a sabotage plot. The car took the turn through the gate on two wheels and sped away.

Shayne's action had given away his position, and he had to run for his life then, as Dravec's men poured lead at him. He felt bullets plunking at his coat more than once as he headed for the gate himself. Something, luck maybe, protected him, and he made it to the street unscathed. He sent the rest of the bullets in his gun back toward the mansion to discourage pursuit, then took out for his car as fast as his long legs would carry him.

As he ran, he noted that the tail lights of Ott's car were still in sight. He made it to his roadster, piled in as more shots came from behind him, and hit the starter. He had never heard a prettier sound than the engine catching. Throwing the car into gear, he floored the gas pedal and swept the wheel in a broad turn. Ott was just about out of sight, but not quite.

The chase took him back toward the Beach. Shayne hoped there were no traffic cops around, because for the second time in the last few hours, the roadster was hitting its top speed. The last thing Shayne

wanted was to be stopped by any of the Beach officers. He was no favorite of theirs, since he had made a habit of showing up their detective chief, the foppish Peter Painter. They would welcome a chance to pull him in, and right now, he just couldn't afford the delay. Too much might be at stake.

As he drove, a wry grin quirked his lips for a moment. *You wanted something to distract you*, he thought.

A pang of guilt followed hard on his heels of that thought. And yet he knew he couldn't let go of the case now, not after what he had learned in the last half hour. This was a matter of national security and the war effort, and as much as he wanted to be at Phyllis' side, dealing with the saboteurs had to come first.

He had cut the lead of the other car quite a bit, disregarding stop signs and red lights, and now he was close enough to see when it suddenly turned off the boulevard and into the parking lot of one of the hotels that lined the beach. This one wasn't a working hotel anymore, like the Royal Palm, though. It had been taken over by the Army and used to house the soldiers who were going through Officer Candidate School. The town was packed with them, and Rourke, who had heard all the rumors there were to hear, had assured Shayne a few days earlier that one of the soldiers was none other than Clark Gable, although the Army wouldn't admit it.

As Shayne slid his roadster onto the lot, he saw his quarry, cap pulled low over his face, running up the front steps and into the hotel. There were a lot of soldiers coming out, and he almost blended in. Shayne braked to a rough stop and went running after him.

There was a guard in olive drab at the door, where an ornately costumed doorman used to be posted, and he held out his hand as Shayne came up the steps two at a time.

"Wait a minute, sir!" he said. "Civilians aren't allowed inside without a pass."

Shayne considered lightning-fast. The guard probably wouldn't believe his story, and even if he did, too much time would be lost in the telling.

So he went past the young soldier without ever slowing down, slapping the doors open and plunging into the lobby of the commandeered hotel. He heard a cry of alarm behind him. Ahead of him, on the other side of the lobby, was the man he was after, just going through the rear exit. Shayne started after him as the guard at the door cried out, "Stop that civilian!"

The lobby was half-full of soldiers, so the guard had no trouble finding someone to do what he said. A dark-haired officer reached out

and grabbed Shayne's arm, jerking him to a stop. Shayne growled, "Let me go, dammit! This is police business!"

"Just hold it, pal," the officer drawled. "I think you've got some explaining to do."

Ott was out of sight now, and unless Shayne got after him right away, the traitor would escape. But the officer was holding Shayne's arm with a tight grip, so . . .

Shayne hit him in the face with his free hand.

The officer went sailing back into the arms of his companions, and Shayne knew he had made a mistake. A wave of Khaki surged toward him, and before he new it, he was surrounded, unable to move, and from the looks on the faces around him, he considered himself lucky that he wasn't being torn limb from limb.

The officer he had hit stood next to him, rubbing a jaw that was going to be sore. He said quietly, "Not in the face, friend. Don't ever hit a guy in the face. You never know whose living you might be ruining."

Shayne glared at him and wondered where he had seen the man before. The officer was handsome in a rugged way, and his ears stuck out —

"What the hell?" a sharp voice asked. "I saw all this commotion in here from the street, but I never expected to find you in the middle of it, Shayne!"

Shayne had never been so glad to see Peter Painter in his life.

VIII. THE VISITOR

PAINTER LOVED EVERY MINUTE OF IT. The stylishly dressed little detective chief relished every advantage he could find over Shayne, and he let the big redhead stew for long minutes before he finally said, "All right, Shayne, I suppose you're telling the truth and you really are on a case. Still determined that you won't tell me what it's about?"

"I can't, Painter, not right now." Shayne was still ringed by the angry soldiers. "I wish you'd tell these guys that I'm not here to blow the place up, though."

Painter sighed. "All right, I'll find the CO and talk to him. You're capable of a lot of things, Shayne, but I don't think even you would do anything to hurt your country and help Hitler and his pals."

Painter went in search of the commanding officer, while Shayne said to the officer whom he had struck, "No hard feelings, I hope, pal. I was just trying to do my job."

"No hard feelings," the man said. "You've certainly aroused my

curiosity, though. What's this all about?"

"Read the *Daily News* tomorrow," Shayne told him. "The case should break by then, and Tim Rourke will have the whole story."

Painter returned then with a grumpy colonel, who ordered the GI's to let Shayne go. The CO had quite a few words to say about civilians who came storming into a military barracks, and Shayne had to stand there and take it unless he wanted to be mobbed again. Painter stood by and watched the display with a smirk on his face.

Shayne finally made it out of the place, followed by a triumphant Painter. As the bantam chief started to crow some more, Shayne swung toward him and said, "Look, Petey, I appreciate what you did in there. You got me out of a jam. But I don't have time to listen to you congratulating yourself. I've got to get the country out of a jam." He spun on his heel and stalked off.

The man in uniform that he had been chasing was long gone, of course. About all he could do now was turn the whole thing over to Nicholson and his MP's. If Ott was really in the military, Nicholson could arrest him, then try to round up Dravec and his men. Shayne wouldn't get to break the case himself, as he had hoped, but the security of the country was more important. He had given it a good shot and come up a little short on his own. It was time to call in the reinforcements.

He pulled out of the hotel parking lot and headed for the nearest causeway. His next move would be to go to the Richmond Lighter-Than-Air Station. He wanted to give the lowdown on the case to Nicholson in person, at least.

As he crossed the Bay, he spotted the lights of the hospital nestled near downtown Miami. It wouldn't take long to stop by there and check on Phyllis. He almost hoped that the baby had already been born. Even though he would have missed the birth, it would be over and he could stop worrying about it. Phyllis had been in the back of his mind all evening, and such concern in one area was liable to make him careless in another area. That was something he couldn't afford, since this case had grown to be so complex and deadly.

Shayne found that he wasn't without a representative in the waiting room. Timothy Rourke was there, his long, lanky form folded up in a chair. When he saw Shayne, he uncoiled himself and said, "Where the hell have you been, Mike? Don't you know your wife is in there trying to have a baby?" There was accusation in Rourke's deep-set eyes.

"How is Phyl, Tim?" Shayne asked intently. "Have you heard anything?"

Rourke sighed. "She's having all kinds of trouble, but the doctor

was out a few minutes ago and said there was still a good chance. He wanted to know where you were, but I didn't know what to tell him."

"Hell, he's the one who told me to go home and get some rest earlier," Shayne growled. "I wish he'd make up his mind."

"Yeah, but you still haven't told me what's up, Mike," Rourke insisted.

"I got mixed up in this damn case that won't seem to let go," Shayne said curtly. "Phyllis wanted me to take it, but that was this afternoon before she came to the hospital. And it's just kept growing, Tim. It started out as a simple missing persons job, but now it's at least one murder and some kind of sabotage."

Rourke's eyes brightened, and Shayne could almost see his nose twitching as he began to smell a story. He said, "Can you give me some details, Mike?"

Shayne shook his head. "It'll have to wait. I'm on my way to turn it all over to the Army right now. They're the ones who'll have to decide whether to spill it or not. Right now, Tim, you can do a favor for me."

"Sure. Although why I should, when you won't give me what I know is a big story . . ."

"Thanks, Tim. If you will, just stick around here and keep an eye on this situation. I'll feel a little better knowing that somebody is here. I should be back in an hour or so."

"No problem," Rourke said. "I've already got my stories in for the next edition, about the advance planning of the President's visit —"

Shayne's hand clamped on Rourke's arm. "What did you say?" A grim hunch had sprung into his head.

"I said I've already got my stories —"

"No, the other part."

"About Roosevelt coming tomorrow? Say, I don't guess you have heard about it. It was kept pretty much of a secret until earlier today, but then the White House let the press in on it. Roosevelt is going to be in Miami tomorrow, to pay a visit to the Officer Candidate School, then he's going down to inspect that blimp place. My God, Mike, what's wrong?"

Shayne took a deep breath. Maybe it was a coincidence, but then again, maybe it wasn't.

Rourke caught his breath, too. He said hurriedly, "You mentioned sabotage, Mike . . . You don't think —"

"I'm not sure what to think," Shayne said shortly. "I know this is too big for a private shamus now, though. I'll be back in a little while, Tim."

"Dammit, Mike, if I don't get a story out of this —"

The closing of the elevator doors cut off Rourke's voice.

Shayne was on the road again moments later, heading south toward the Richmond air base. The pieces of the puzzle had come together in his mind, to form a frightening picture. It wasn't a hunch any longer, at least not to him. He was convinced that what Dravec and his traitorous partner had in mind was an assassination.

They were going to kill the President.

IX. UNEXPECTED ANSWERS

THAT PUT A NEW LIGHT ON THINGS. There was no room for any doubt now; Shayne had to give all his information to Major Nicholson. Nicholson would no doubt bring the Secret Service and Military Intelligence in on it, and with any luck, the scheme could be quashed before anything came of it.

Shayne shook his head. He never would have dreamed when Harvey Sheppard came to his apartment this afternoon that the young soldier's visit would have such far-reaching implications.

He was pushing the roadster to its limit again. It seemed as if he had been speeding all night, but the gasoline usage was in a good cause. He didn't see how the Ration Board could complain, under the circumstances.

Shayne couldn't see the bulk of the gigantic hangars this time, but he was able to pick out the lights of the field. He had made good time, and he hoped he would be able to keep his promise to Rourke that he would be back to the hospital in an hour. Phyllis was going to be surprised when he told her how the case she had urged him to take had turned out.

He turned the roadster in at the gate of the base entrance and said to the guard who challenged him, "I'm here to see Major Nicholson. I'm on urgent business, and my name is Mike Shayne."

He had to produce his identification, then the guard said, "Just let me call the MP's office, sir."

Shayne chafed at the delay, but he wasn't going to go charging in. He had already gotten in trouble for doing that once tonight.

The guard hung up his phone and nodded. "The Corporal says you were here earlier today. You can go in."

"Thanks," Shayne told him, then eased the roadster into the air base.

He parked in front of the building where Nicholson's office was located and hurried up the steps. Inside, the same young enlisted man who had been there earlier was still behind the desk. Shayne said,

"Don't you ever go off duty?"

The Corporal grinned. "Sometimes, sir. But we're busy today."

Shayne knew why. There would be a lot of things to get squared away before the President of the United States paid a visit.

"I need to see Major Nicholson," Shayne said, "Shayne said. "Is he in his office?"

"No, sir, I'm afraid he's out right now. I thought maybe I could help you, Mr. Shayne. Is it about the case you're working on? The Shepard murder?"

"Yeah," Shayne said. He was disturbed by Nicholson's absence. He wasn't sure that a corporal had the authority to set the proper wheels in motion. "How much do you know about that?"

"Not really anything, I'm afraid. The Major is handling the investigation personally. I haven't even typed up any reports yet."

"Will Nicholson be back soon?"

"I don't know. He didn't say where he was going when he left."

This was getting them nowhere fast. Shayne went to the window and frowned in concentration. He supposed he could call the FBI or even the Secret Service, but they wouldn't know the background of the case. They might think he was some sort of crackpot, out for publicity or who knows what. He had to admit that as screwy as the evening had been, he might not believe it either if he hadn't lived through it.

Shayne was staring out at the still-busy base and worrying at his earlobe, when he suddenly stiffened and narrowed his eyes. Across a courtyard, a sergeant in fatigues and cap came out of a building and hurried down the road, intent on some errand. Even in the uniform, Shayne had no trouble recognizing him.

It was the man called Ott.

"I'll be back later," Shayne called over his shoulder to the Corporal as he almost ran out of the office. He was on the porch of the bulding a second later, and he could still see the noncom striding down the road. Shayne felt a fierce exultation. Maybe he could still take a personal hand in the cracking of this case.

He hurreid after Ott. The Sergeant must have heard his footsteps, because he glanced over his shoulder. Shayne saw his eyes widen in surprise, and the big detective broke into a run.

Ott tried to run, too, but Shayne was too close. He caught up with Ott, grabbed his shoulders, and spun the man around. Ott threw a clumsy punch that Shayne avoided easily.

Shayne stepped in, ready to drive a blow to Ott's belly and knock the fight out of him, when he saw that he had seriously underestimated his opponent. Ott's other hand had swept behind him and come up with a

snub-nosed pistol that definitely wasn't standard Army issue. Shayne tried to duck, but the gun cracked into his temple.

He staggered, but still managed to hook a punch at Ott that caught the Sergeant on the chest. Ott grunted and swung the pistol again. It clipped Shayne a second time.

Shayne barely had time to wonder why Ott had raised no outcry. There were soldiers all around, and if Ott yelled for help, Shayne was sure the GI's would react just the same as the ones in the hotel had a little earlier. They wouldn't know that Ott was a traitor; all they would see was a civilian fighting with one of their own.

Ott was fighting with deadly silence, though, and the patch of shadow they were in concealed them from any casual observers. Ott was a better fighter than he had appeared to be at first. He was landing some hard punches and taking some good ones from Shayne. The only sounds were their harsh breathing and the scuffle of their feet as they jockeyed for an advantage.

It was bad luck that decided the fight. Shayne's foot slipped in a patch of loose gravel and his guard came down long enough for Ott to crack the gun against his jaw. Shayne felt his feet go out from under him, and his head slammed into the road as he fell. A wave of dizziness washed over him, and he couldn't get up. He felt Ott stoop, grab his coat, and start to drag him, but there was nothing he could do about it for the moment. Blackness was threatening to engulf him.

Shayne never really lost consciousness, but by the time his senses fully returned to him, he felt Ott tying the last knot in a rope that securely bound his hands and feet. They were in a building somewhere, Shayne knew that because he couldn't see the stars overhead anymore. Ott was breathing heavily from the exertion of dragging his large frame.

Ott took out a cigarette lighter and flicked it on, and the light from the wavering flame showed Shayne that they were in a storage shed of some sort. There were tools covering the walls, hanging on pegs.

"You just don't know when to get out of something and stay out, do you, Shayne?" Ott said quietly. "I had hoped we taught you a lesson earlier. But you don't give up."

"Not when I'm hunting a bunch of mad-dog killers," Shayne growled.

"What the hell are you talking about?" Ott sounded genuinely puzzled, but then a traitor would have to be a good actor.

"I'm talking about you killing Briggs and Sheppard," Shayne said. "That won't do you any good, though, Ott. I heard you and Dravec talking earlier, and I know that your plan hasn't got a chance of

success. The Secret Service knows all about it by now." He watched closely to see if Ott was falling for his bluff.

Ott studied Shayne for a long moment, then said, "I think there's been a misunderstanding here, Shayne. You think I'm working with Dravec?"

"I saw you talking to him," Shayne said flatly.

"That's impossible. I've been here on the base all evening."

Shayne glared up at Ott, but he suddenly realized that he had never seen the face of the man he had pursued from Dravec's earlier. He had assumed that it was Ott, since Ott and his men were the ones who had attacked him earlier, but it was possible Ott was telling the truth . . .

"Why did you and your boys run me off the road and try to rough me up?"

Ott sighed. "We were just trying to get some information. I guess we got carried away, I'm sorry, Shayne. But we knew that Sheppard had gone to see you and we thought you might know something about Briggs. You can't blame us for getting rough. For all we knew, you were working with Dravec."

Shayne's head was swimming with confusion. He said, "If you didn't have anything to do with Briggs' disappearance, then what is he to you?"

"One of my agents," Ott said. "I think I'd better show you my I.D., Shayne. I'm starting to think we're on the same side."

Ott took his wallet out and worked for a moment to remove a card from a concealed pocket. He held it out so that Shayne could see it.

"Military Intelligence?" Shayne barked. "Who the hell are you trying to fool?"

"It's on the level, Shayne," Ott said quietly. "I'm a Captain in G-2, and Jerry Briggs was an undercover operative that I assigned to this base."

Shayne frowned. "And Sheppard?"

"He was just who he said he was. He was a friend of Briggs', and he wanted to find out what happened to him. It was a decision that got him killed, because someone else besides us must have been keeping an eye on him."

Shayne shook his head, trying to clear it. The picture he had formed had been scrambled, and now he had to fit the pieces together again. He said, "If you're on the level, how about laying all the pieces out for me?"

"All right," Ott nodded. "You know about Anton Dravec?"

"I know he used to be a gangster in Germany."

"He's a German agent and has been ever since he came over here,

we think. The story about him being run out of Germany was a cover. Hitler knew even then that the United States would be standing up to his mad plans someday, so he planted agents over here. We're still trying to dig them all out, but we're convinced that Dravec is one of them, now more than ever."

"What convinced you?"

"Jerry's disappearance, Lord help us. His mission was to make a play for Dravec's girlfriend, so that he could get a little closer to Dravec."

"He got too close," Shayne murmured. "I heard Dravec all but admit earlier that Briggs was dead."

Ott took a clasp knife from his pocket and knelt beside Shayne. "I'm going to cut you loose. I had you wrong, Shayne. You were just trying to find Briggs for Sheppard, weren't you?"

"That's right. I never figured on all this other happening. If I had known, I might not have taken the case. My wife may be having a baby right now, you know."

Ott smiled slightly. "Congratulations. I wish we had time to smoke a cigar on it. But what's this about you seeing Dravec talking to somebody you thought was me?"

Shayne stood up and stretched cramped muscles. "It was a man in uniform, Dravec's partner. I tried to follow him, but he got away from me. I just figured it was you, that you and Dravec were working together on the plan to kill Roosevelt."

"What?!"

Shayne smiled grimly. "I'm glad you don't have everything figured out. I heard Dravec and his partner talking about a pilot not suspecting and about how the bomb was ready, and I know that the President is going to be here tomorrow. Do you know if Roosevelt is going up in one of those blimps?"

Ott rubbed his jaw. "I believe there is a short demonstration scheduled . . . My God, Shayne, you must be right! They're planning to assassinate him!"

Shayne nodded. "That's the way I see it. And somebody on this base is in on it with Dravec. When I saw you walking by outside a few minutes ago, it just confirmed my hunch. You've got me convinced otherwise now, though."

"Who could it be? We've got to find out, Shayne, if we're going to stop their plan. You couldn't tell anything about the man when you saw him?"

Shayne shook his head. "Only that he was in uniform," he said. "I guess it could be anybody on the base —" Shayne broke off suddenly.

An idea had occurred to him, an idea that was far-fetched on the surface, but it just might answer all the questions if it was true. He asked, "Who's in charge of tracking down the soldiers who go AWOL?"

"The Military Police," Ott told him. "When a GI goes over the hill, the report on it goes from his company commander to the MP's."

"Nicholson," Shayne said flatly.

Ott's eyebrows raised in surprise.

"There was no investigation into Jerry Brigg's disappearance," Shayne went on. "Nicholson was in a position to make sure the AWOL report went no further than him. And Nicholson was in charge of the investigation into Sheppard's murder. He could make sure that nothing turned up. Because he probably pulled the trigger himself!"

"It could be," Ott mused. "But there's no proof — "

"Then let's get started finding some," Shayne said, stalking out of the shed.

The MP corporal was busy with paperwork when Shayne and Ott came into the office a few moments later. He said, "Mr. Shayne! What's happening, sir? I didn't know what to think when you went tearing out of the office a little while ago."

"I had some urgent business to take care of," Shayne said, with a glance out of the corner of his eye at Ott. "You think you could answer a couple of questions for me, son?"

"I'll sure try."

"Were you on duty here about three o'clock this afternoon?"

"Yes, sir. I've been here all day."

"Was Major Nicholson here then?"

"No sir. He had to go off post this afternoon. I believe he had to go into Miami."

Shayne and Ott exchanged grim looks. Shayne said, "Thanks. You don't know whether he's on the base or not?"

"No, sir. You could check with the guard on the gate. The Major pretty well comes and goes as he pleases, though."

Shayne nodded, and he and Ott went back outside. Shayne said, "Still think we need proof?"

"All we know is that Nicholson wasn't here at the time of Sheppard's murder. That doesn't prove he killed anybody."

"You're a stubborn one, aren't you? Come on, Ott."

"Where are we going?"

"It's time we went to see Dravec face to face. We're going to bust this case wide open, you and me."

Ott looked dubious, but he followed Shayne. The big detective got

into his roadster, and Ott took the passenger's seat.

"We're just going to bust in on Dravec?" Ott asked.

"That's right," Shayne said. His mouth curved in a grin. "We've made enough deductions. Now it's time to do something about them."

X. DEATH FLIGHT

THE GUARD AT THE GATE WANTED TO KNOW where Ott's pass was. The Captain from G-2 sighed and pulled a piece of paper from his wallet. "There goes my cover," he said to Shayne as the guard scanned the special pass and then snapped to attention. "Nobody's going to believe I'm an ordinary sergeant after this."

"You'll just pick up a new cover and a new mission," Shayne told him.

Ott shook his head as the guard waved them on. "I don't know. This work is getting too nerve-wracking. Lord, I — I never thought we'd run across anything like this."

Shayne's mouth was a taut line as he pulled away from the gate. "It's the biggest thing I've ever been mixed up in," he muttered. "But when you get down to it, it's still murder, and that's my business."

He pressed the accelerator down, sending the roadster shooting toward Miami. After a moment, he said, "It wouldn't take much of a bomb to bring down a blimp, would it?"

"If it was in the right place, even a very small explosion could be catastrophic," Ott said. "You remember the Hindenburg, don't you?"

Shayne certainly did. In fact, he and Tim Rourke had been in a bar in Miami when the German blimp had exploded, and they had seen the newsreel footage of the disaster in a downtown theater. A bomb could easily turn a gas-filled blimp into a murder weapon.

"We'll round up Dravec and Nicholson tonight," Shayne promised. "And it might be a good idea to alert the Secret Service, too."

"They'll cancel the President's visit if there's the slightest hint of danger."

"That's the idea. He can look at the blimps some other time."

Shayne could see the lights of Miami ahead of them, even though they were a lot dimmer and farther between. So far in this war, he reflected, Miami had stayed relatively untouched, despite the fears of many of its occupants that they would be bombed or shelled any minute. But Shayne knew that if the plan Dravec and Nicholson had hatched was successful, the Axis would strike one of their most powerful blows right here in his adopted hometown.

There wasn't much conversation between the two of them as Shayne piloted the roadster through Miami, across Biscayne Bay, and north toward Bal Harbour. As he drove, he took the .38 from his pocket, got Ott to hand him a box of shells from the glove compartment, and re-loaded it. Ott checked his own gun.

"Do you think Nicholson will be at Dravec's?" Ott asked as they cruised down the boulevard.

"Maybe," Shayne replied. "He was there earlier tonight, bringing Dravec up to date on the Sheppard business. Nicholson must have been keeping an eye on Sheppard, and when he saw him paying a visit to a private detective, he decided to kill him. It was too late by then, of course. Sheppard had already rung me in on the case, even though he didn't have any idea what it was really all about."

"We can grab Dravec anyway," Ott said. "Considering what you overheard earlier, it's time for the kid gloves to come off."

"Damn right," Shayne grunted.

He parked down the street from Dravec's estate again, for the third time since the afternoon. "They're liable to have increased their security," Shayne said. "They've caught me there twice already today. I went in the same way both times, so it might be a good idea to find another way in this time."

"I agree. What about the ocean?"

"That's what I was thinking."

They slipped through the vacant estate next to Dravec's, but instead of going through the hedge, they went all the way down to the beach. Shayne put a hand on Ott's arm to stop him, then pointed. Ott saw the shadowy figures on the grounds of Dravec's house. Shayne put his mouth to Ott's ear and whispered, "He's got guards out. This won't be easy."

"Maybe we need a diversion." They were crouched behind a big-boled palm tree, deep in shadows. Shayne saw Ott reach inside his shirt and pull something out.

"What the hell?" Shayne muttered. "Is that what I think it is?"

"A hand grenade," Ott nodded. "But it's been disarmed. It makes a good tool to bluff with, though. I'll go to the front gate and ring the bell, then when the guards come, flip it in among them. That ought to shake them up. Then you can come up from the beach."

"You're liable to get shot pulling something like that."

"I don't know of a safe way to storm this place."

"All right," Shayne breathed. "You've got a point. I'll take off for the house when I hear the yelling start."

Ott faded away in the darkness while Shayne flitted to the end of the

hedge, stretching out behind it, pistol gripped tightly in his hand. A minute went by, then two, and Shayne felt his nerves start to stretch toward the breaking point. He was all right as long as he was doing something, but waiting gave him an opportunity to think, both about the ordeal that Phyllis was going through and the monstrous plot that he had uncovered.

He caught a hint of voices coming from the front of the estate, and then suddenly a voice yelled, "Grenade!" Somebody else shouted, "Hit the dirt!"

Shayne surged to his feet and sprinted toward Dravec's house, not worrying about being quiet now but just letting his long legs cover the ground as fast as they could. He heard shots begin to pop.

No one challenged him as he charged the house. There were glass doors in the rear of it, leading out onto a patio, and they sprang open as Shayne's foot crashed into the latch, snapping it easily. The glass shattered as the door slammed back.

Shayne kept his balance and went skidding into the house, finding himself in a study with an open door leading out into a hall. He plunged through it and ran right into one of the men who had beaten him earlier. The man let out a yelp that was cut off abruptly as Shayne cracked the gun against his skull with great force and satisfaction. The man crumpled.

There were footsteps running up behind him, and a gun suddenly blasted. Shayne felt the breeze of the slug as it whizzed past his ear. He spun around, snapping his gun up and firing instinctively in one smooth motion.

Anton Dravec cursed and dropped his gun. Shayne's bullet had creased his arm from wrist to elbow; Dravec clutched the wounded limb. As Shayne sprang toward him, he screamed, "In here! Help!"

Shayne backhanded him fiercely, knocking him against the wall, then drove a fist into his stomach. Dravec gasped and started to collapse, but Shayne grabbed his collar and held him up.

"Come on!" Shayne grated. There was still firing going on outside. "You're going to call off your dogs!"

He marched Dravec to the front of the house in time to see three of Dravec's men bringing Ott onto the porch. The Intelligence officer looked to be uninjured, but his gun was gone and his expression was crestfallen. Shayne jerked the front door open and confronted the group, his gun at Dravec's head.

"Hold it!" Shayne snapped. "Let that man go. Get over here, Ott. Try anything and I'll put a bullet in your boss's head."

"Don't pay any attention to him!" Dravec raved. "Shoot him!"

The guards hesitated, though, and that hesitation was all Ott needed. He spun, slamming a blow to the jaw of one of the men and grabbing the guard's pistol. A quick step put him beside Shayne.

"They caught up to me a little quicker than I had expected," Ott said. "But it looks like you've got things under control."

"For the time being. Come on, Dravec, we're going to get out of here."

Dravec was trembling in outrage. "You can't do this! It's illegal!"

"So is plotting to blow up the President," Shayne grunted. "Let's go!"

"So you know about that," a new voice said behind them. "That's too bad."

Shayne planted a hand in Dravec's back and shoved, sending the German sprawling into his guards, then joined Ott in spinning around to confront the new menace . . .

"Dammit," Shayne said, "I knew I should have covered my back." He dropped his gun, and Ott did likewise.

Major Nicholson was standing there in the hall behind them, a sub-machine gun cradled lovingly in his hands. He covered Shayne and Ott and said, "I'm tired of you turning up and sticking your nose where it's not wanted, Shayne. And you, Sergeant, what are you doing here?" Nicholson smiled craftily. "Unless you're not a sergeant at all. Military Intelligence, right?"

Ott didn't have a chance to answer. Dravec and his men swarmed over the two of them while Nicholson kept the machine gun trained on them. Shayne and the man from G-2 never had a chance.

Fifteen minutes later, bruised, half-conscious, and trussed up like a pair of pigs, Shayne and Ott were dumped in the back of Nicholson's military sedan. A blanket was thrown over them to muffle sound. Shayne was still able to hear Dravec say, "What are you going to do with them?"

"Get rid of them, of course. They know too much. But if they haven't spilled what they know to anyone else, the plan can still work. And I'll dispose of them where no one will ever find them."

"I'll leave it up to you," Dravec said nervously. "Just get them out of here, and quickly. Someone may have reported the shooting that went on earlier."

"I'll see you in the morning," Nicholson said. Shayne felt him get into the front seat of the car, and then the door slammed. "Heil."

There was cynicism in Nicholson's voice, Shayne knew. Ott moaned softly beside him. Both of them were gagged, and their bonds were so tight that Shayne felt his fingers and toes going numb.

Shayne lay very still on the floorboard, letting some of his strength come back to him slowly. The beating hadn't been too bad, but on top of everything else, it had pretty well taken the last of his energy. He would need some rest, if he was going to put up a fight when the time came.

The ride took another quarter of an hour. Shayne was able to tell when they crossed a causeway to Miami, and then Nicholson turned the sedan south. Shayne wasn't surprised when, a little later, the car came to a stop and he heard Nicholson exchange greetings with the guard at the gate of the Richmond Lighter-Than-Air Station. Nicholson had brought them back to the base. Shayne didn't know what the renegade Major had in mind, but he knew it wouldn't be anything pleasant.

The sound of the car's engine became hollower and echoing a moment later, as Nicholson brought it to a stop again. Nicholson got out and opened the rear door, pulling the blanket off Shayne and Ott. Shayne blinked at the sudden light, but after a few seconds, his eyes adjusted and he could see that they were in one of the huge, hulking hangars. The ceiling loomed far above, and Shayne could also see part of one of the giant blimps.

Nicholson leaned into the car and took hold of Shayne's collar. He pulled Shayne out off the floorboard and dumped him on the concrete floor of the hangar, then repeated the action with Ott. Shayne saw that there was another man standing there with Nicholson, this one clad in a khaki uniform and a leather jacket.

The man swallowed nervously and said, "I don't much like this, Major."

"I don't care whether you like it or not," Nicholson returned. "We're doing it the way I said." He put his hands on his hips and smiled mockingly down at Shayne and Ott. "You two seem to know so much about blimps. Now you're going for a ride in one." He motioned curtly to the other man. "Let's get them aboard."

As far as Shayne could tell, the four of them were alone in the hangar. With Nicholson and the other man working together, it didn't take long to place Shayne and Ott in the cabin of the blimp. Nicholson said, "Lieutenant Ballard and I will be taking this blimp up for a routine patrol later. You and the Sergeant will be going part of the way with us, Shayne."

Shayne knew perfectly well what he meant by that. Nicholson and the pilot left them there, closing the hatch into the gondola. About all they could do was stare helplessly at each other. Shayne tried every way he could think of to get out of the ropes that held him fast, but the

effort was futile.

It wasn't long before they heard the sounds of activity around them. Shayne supposed that the crew responsible for launching the blimp had arrived. No one checked the gondola, though, until the pilot, Lieutenant Ballard, opened the hatch again. He climbed in, followed closely by Nicholson. Shayne had just rolled over closer to the wall, hoping to be able to kick it and attract some attention, but Nicholson put a stop to that. He planted the toe of his shoe in Shayne's already-sore ribs and said, "Forget it, Shayne. Once the engine starts, nobody would be able to hear you anyway."

Ballard was in the process of starting the engine at that very moment. The shrill whine of its ignition turned into a deep, full-throated roar that drowned out everything else. Following the hand signals of his crew, Ballard guided the lighter-than-air craft out of the hangar, down a runway, and slowly, majestically, into the night sky.

Nicholson knelt beside Shayne and Ott and pulled their gags loose. "No need for those now," he said, his good humor coming through in his raised voice. "You can yell all you want."

Shayne worked his mouth for a moment, before he was able to croak, "You bastard . . . Why, Nicholson?"

The MP major laughed. "Why? For the money, of course. I mean, I love my country and all, but every man has his price, and Dravec found mine."

"I — I'll see you in front of a firing squad!" Ott gasped.

"I doubt it. Before long, you won't be seeing anything but the fish!" Nicholson smiled and waved a hand out at the space around them. "You'll have a nice view on the way down, though. That's more than Briggs got. He was already dead when we dropped him. Dravec shot him when he finally got suspicious. Briggs just tried to pump the girl about Dravec once too often. Dravec overheard him asking questions."

Shayne could see the fury burning in Ott's eyes at Nicholson's words. He felt a fresh surge of outrage himself. As despicable as Dravec was, at least he was working for a cause he believed in. Nicholson was below even that, betraying his country for his own profit.

But besides his outrage, Shayne felt fear — fear for himself and for Ott, fear for his country, but most of all, fear that he would never see his wife again. And that fear told him that he had to do something . . .

"We're no danger to you now, Nicholson," he said over the noise of the engine. "At least tell us exactly what you've got planned."

Nicholson shrugged. "No reason not to." Shayne noticed that he did shoot a glance at the back of Ballard's head, though. "The Lieutenant here is going to be flying the President tomorrow. He's going to

foul up and nearly crash, which will scare the pants off Roosevelt and make the Air Corps look like a bunch of idiots. Of course, there won't be any real danger, but Roosevelt won't know that. The incident will look bad on Ballard's records, maybe, but he'll be well paid."

"He'll have a hard time spending it when he's dead," Shayne said bluntly. He was rewarded with a slight jerk of Ballard's head.

Nicholson frowned. "Nobody's dying but you two," he declared.

Ott saw what Shayne had in mind and chimed in, "You really ought to tell Ballard the whole plan, so that he'll know what he's getting into."

"Anyway," Shayne said, "The Atlantic's the wrong ocean for a kamikaze mission."

Ballard glanced over his shoulder. "What are you talking about?" he said nervously.

"Nothing —" Nicholson started to reply, but Shayne cut in. "He and Dravec are going to plant a bomb on this crate, Ballard, so that the President will never get down alive. You know what a bomb will do, don't you?"

Ballard turned away from the controls and licked his lips. "I saw that film of the Hindenburg —" he said.

"Forget it!" Nicholson exclaimed. "They're just trying to confuse you!"

"Well, I am confused!" Ballard said indignantly. "Nobody ever said anything about a bomb. You know how unstable these big airbags are!"

Nicholson turned away from Shayne and Ott to exhort Ballard not to pay any attention. Shayne knew he'd never have a better chance.

He rolled.

It was hard to get up any momentum, but he didn't need much. He slammed into Nicholson's shins, knocking the officer off balance. Nicholson staggered and went to one knee. Ballard leaped up from his seat in front of the controls.

Ott swung his legs around in a sweeping motion, knocking Ballard's feet out from under him. The pilot fell backwards, catching himself on the control panel. The nose of the blimp tilted sharply up, and so did the floor of the gondola.

Shayne threw himself at Nicholson. He was wrapped up like a mummy, but his head hit Nicholson's stomach like a battering ram, with all the force of his nearly two hundred pounds behind it. Nicholson let out a yell and went flying backwards as the blimp continued to tilt.

Shayne fell to the floor and began to roll, unable to stop himself. He

heard a crash and then the sound of glass shattering, and a roaring wind suddenly filled the cabin. He slammed into the side of the gondola with stunning impact, but glancing up, he saw the gaping hole in the glass window that went all around the gondola. He had hit right below the glass, but Nicholson hadn't been so lucky.

Ballard was holding onto the pilot's chair and scrabbling for the controls. He managed to get hold of them and began to correct the attitude of the big vessel.

"All right, soldier," Ott barked, "get us loose here and then point this thing back to Richmond."

Ballard's eyes were wide with shock. He looked around wildly and saw that Nicholson was gone, then stammered, "I — I can't! The Major —"

"The Major went out that window, Lieutenant, and since I'm a Captain, I'm giving the orders now. Cut us loose and take us back to the base." A deadly intensity came into Ott's voice. "It's a firing squad for sure unless you do what I say, Lieutenant."

Shayne saw Ballard wavering, and suddenly the pilot was pulling a clasp knife from his pocket and striding toward them. He bent over and began to slash the ropes.

Shayne and Ott were on their feet a few moments later, trying to massage some life back into their numb limbs. Shayne glanced out the shattered window at the emptiness outside. "How high up are we?" he asked.

"Three thousand feet," Ballard answered shakily.

Shayne knew there was no point in asking about Nicholson.

"Well," Ott said, "I think we've managed to blunt this thing, Shayne. Dravec is going to be surprised when I show up on his doorstep with a company of men. And Ballard here will be glad to testify to everything he knows, won't you, Ballard?"

"Yes, sir," the frightened pilot said.

"So I'd say it was a good night's work, even if things did get a little close there for a while."

"Can you get a little more speed out of this thing?" Shayne asked Ballard.

"You in a hurry?" Ott asked.

Shayne's face was grim "I've got to get to the hospital."

XI. DAWN

IT WAS WELL AFTER MIDNIGHT when Michael Shayne hurried into the waiting room at the hospital. Will Gentry and Timothy Rourke

looked up from the chairs where they sat and saw him come striding in. Rourke bounced up out of his chair and exclaimed, "Mike! Where the hell have you been?"

"For a blimp ride," Shayne grunted. "How's Phyllis?"

"A blimp ride — ? What the . . . Never mind. The situation's worse, Mike. I'm sorry, but the doctor is pretty worried."

Shayne's face might have been carved out of granite to the casual observer, but Rourke saw the pain in his old friend's eyes. The lanky reporter went on, "I didn't know where to get hold of you, but I tried all over anyway. I even called that writer friend of yours, but he hadn't seen you. He said he was going to come over to wait with us."

Shayne took a deep breath and said, "Thanks for being here, Tim. You, too, Will. I appreciate it. I would have been here myself, but I got wrapped up in this case . . . and the way it turned out, it's a good thing. I hope Phyllis won't mind."

"What about the case, Mike?" Gentry asked.

Shayne shrugged. "It came out all right. A guy from Military Intelligence and I caught a German agent and a traitor in our own Air Corps and kept them from blowing up Roosevelt tomorrow."

He never even saw the gaping looks on the faces of his friends. His eyes were turned inward, studying the memories of the last few years. Realization was coming to him, a recognition of a much deeper fear that had been with him all night. He had been trying to ignore it, but now, here in the hospital, he could push it to the back of his mind no longer.

He was afraid. Afraid that he might have to face life without Phyllis, not knowing whether he was strong enough to do that anymore. There was a time he had been almost arrogantly self-sufficient, but she had changed all that. She had given him something that had never been in his life before . . . love.

He tightened his mouth and gave a slight shake of his head. He had never given in to fear before, and he wasn't going to start now. All that he could do now was wait, and it wouldn't do any good to spend the time in futile speculation.

He saw Rourke look at something over his shoulder, and he turned to see another man entering the waiting room. The newcomer was medium height, with dark, slightly curly hair. A black eye patch covered his left eye.

Shayne put out his hand, shook briefly with the man, and said, "Thanks for coming, Brett."

"I was glad to, Mike," the man said. "Wish I could do something to help."

"Just being here is a help," Shayne told him.

The four men sat down. Shayne slouched in his chair, legs stretched out in front of him and brows drawn down in a scowl. He lit a cigarette and then forgot to smoke it, letting it dangle from his fingers. There was a clock on one wall, and he would occasionally glance at it, but that was the extent of his motion. The other three men talked among themselves in low tones. Rourke's newsman's instinct was driving him crazy, but he didn't ask Shayne the questions about the just-concluded case that he wanted to. He settled for swapping shop talk with the man with the eyepatch.

The hands on the clock moved from three o'clock to four o'clock to five. And in those hours, Michael Shayne, who hadn't been to church since his Irish mother had taken him to Mass, remembered how to pray.

More time dragged by, and Shayne finally got to his feet, walking slowly over to the room's one window. He looked out at Miami and saw the rosy glow of the new day beginning. It looked like it would be a beautiful day . . .

"Michael," the doctor said quietly. Shayne stiffened and didn't turn around. He could tell by the tone of the man's voice what the news was. Rourke began to say softly, over and over, "Oh, damn, damn, damn . . ."

Shayne heard the doctor say again, "Michael," but he still didn't move. There was no point in it now.

He wanted to watch the sun rise for just a little while longer, before he turned to face the darkness.

Next month Mike Shayne returns
in a modern-day story of witchcraft and terror

KILLER'S EVE
by Brett Halliday

Don't miss it!

Mike Shayne

Mystery Makers

In case you're wondering who the writer with the eyepatch is who appears as a character in **MAYHEM IN THE MAGIC CITY**, here's a picture of him. We won't tell you his full name, but his initials are B.H., and we've run stories under his byline in quite a few issues of **MSMM**.



MIKE TAYLOR (*Death of a Pulpster*) started out in the northwoods of Wisconsin around three and a half decades ago. Began to travel at age 18, compliments of Uncle Sam's Tour Service, and have since seen both sides of the world a number of times. Currently reside in the country about twenty miles east of St. Louis with my wife Barbara (the brains of the family) and a large, well-traveled dog. Knew I wanted to be a writer from age 10 when I became hooked on Edgar Rice Burroughs, but took a while to get around to it. My first published story was *EASY MONEY* in the March 1978 **MSMM**. As you can no doubt tell from *DEATH OF A PULPSTER*, I'm a student of the pulps. The great fiction mills of the thirties fascinate me, as well as the writers who churned out the staggering amount of wordage they demanded (estimated to be as high as 200 million words a year at their peak). **MSMM** and a few others are direct descendants of that era and, as such, provide a much-needed outlet for writers to practice the craft of short fiction.

Continued on page 68

1927-1940

When Carroll James Daly created Race Williams, there's little doubt that the lurid adventure of the super-tough private eye influenced many other pulp writers in the creation of a legion of gut-busting detectives!

Pulp Pioneer Of The Private Eye

by WILLIAM F. NOLAN

WHEN SAMUEL DASHIELL HAMMETT DIED in January of 1961, critics mourned the passing of "the originator of the hardboiled school." They cited Hammett's famed detective, Sam Spade, as the forerunner of all the tough, seedy "private eyes" of literature, films, radio and television — from Marlowe through Mike Hammer to Lew Archer. No doubt of it: Hammett fathered them all.

The critics were wrong.

Spade's first adventure, *The Maltese Falcon*, was published by Knopf in 1930. Three years earlier, in 1927, a small publishing house in New York, E.J. Clode, Inc., issued a novel called *The Snarl of the Beast*. Historically, half a century later, it stands as the first published book in this specialized genre — and its author, Carroll John Daly, must be credited as the true creator of the hard-boiled private eye.

The tough detective was Race Williams, who introduced himself in the first chapter:

" . . . a sharp eye, a quick draw, and a steady trigger finger drove me into the game. Also you might add to that an aptitude for getting out of trouble almost as quickly as I get into it . . . I'm licensed as a private detective . . . My position is not exactly a healthy one. The police don't like me. The crooks don't like me. I'm just a halfway house between the law and crime; sort of working both ends against the middle . . . My ethics are my own . . . and I'll shoot it out with any gun in the city — any time, any place."

Williams made his debut in *Black Mask* in mid-1923 (six years before Hammett created Sam Spade for the same magazine). Readers were quick to respond to Daly's trigger-happy tough guy — and his incredible exploits filled the pages of this pulp-action publication for the next dozen years. Daly had Race Williams blast his way through eight serials and twenty-seven shorter adventures for *Black Mask* — and eight books were published featuring Daly's trigger-quick detective.

Yet no one reads them today. Carroll John Daly's name is unknown to the modern reader who relishes Hammett and Chandler.

There is a reason: from the outset of his career in 1922, to the end of his productivity in the 1950s, Daly remained an artificial, awkward, self-conscious pulpster, endlessly repetitious, hopelessly melodramatic; he had absolutely no ability for three-dimensional characterization, nor did he possess a feel for language or mood. Able to grind out a formula product high on action and low on style, Daly was cursed with a tin ear. His dialogue was impossibly stilted ("Oh, I ain't got any particular dislike to you . . . well, you can get some sleep tonight anyways.") and totally lacked the rhythm and bite of his gifted contemporaries, Hammett and Chandler.

And, beyond all these failings, he was politically naïve. (As Philip Durham put it, "Hammett had a social conscience which Carroll John Daly never dreamed of.")

In the May 15th issue of *Black Mask*, — just two weeks before the introduction of Race Williams ("Knights of the Open Palm" — June 1, 1923) — Daly presented his first full-fledged private eye, Terry Mack, in a novelet titled "Three Gun Terry." Mack, who later func-

tioned as the hero of Daly's third novel, *The Man in the Shadows* (Clode, 1928) was a direct prototype for Williams: a first-person narrator who was basically lawless, fast-shooting, tough and illiterate. (Daly invariably associated toughness with illiteracy.)

Mack, who carries twin .45s and a .25 sleeve gun, introduces himself in a manner and style almost identical to Williams:

"I play the game . . . my own way. I'm in the center of a triangle; between the crook and the police and the victim. The police have had an eye on me for some time . . . they don't get my lay at all. The crooks, well, most of them don't know what to think, until I've put the hooks in them."

Daly produced what might be termed "instant cliches." His "Three Gun Terry" is remarkable in the sense that almost every cliche which was to plague the private eye genre from the 20s into the 70s is evident in this pioneer novelet.

Mack is tough, but sentimental about innocent girls; he is a knight who rescues the damsel in distress; he is fast with a gun and a wise-crack; he knows the underworld and avoids the police who wish to "nail" him; he is broke and eats from fee to fee, job to job; he stays clear of romantic entanglements; he makes his own laws — although his code is one of basic honesty; he has a cast-iron skull, and he never backs down in a brawl.

The plot of this first private eye novelet merits examination.

Daly begins with his detective spoiling the action. ("I have a little office which says 'Terry Mack, Private Investigator' on the door . . . Sometimes things is slow and I go out looking for business.") On this particular night, prowling the downtown streets of New York, Mack happens upon a kidnap: a lovely young girl is being hustled into a cab. Terry goes into action; he grabs a ride on the tire rack, works his way into the car, and proceeds to get rid of the thugs. After taking the victim home, he is hired by the girl (and her uncle) to recover a secret formula for a deadly gas — and to protect the girl. His fee is \$50 per day, plus bonus money. (He insists on a \$200 boost in his daily fee for every enemy corpse he provides).

When the girl disappears, Mack works over a stoolie to obtain information on her whereabouts ("I had seen to it that there wasn't enough left of his map to smile . . .") and invades the house where she's being tortured for her father's formula. Mack guns down two hoods and breaks into the torture room only to get conked on the head. (Instant

cliche: "Something like a ton of bricks comes down and . . . after that . . . everything goes black.")

Mack wakes up with a gunman facing him, but uses his .25 sleeve weapon to put the thug out of business with a neat shot between the eyes. The girl is saved — but Mack must face his old adversary, Detective Sergeant Quinn (. . . "who's been trying to hook something on me since George Washington was a boy.") He uses influence to shake free and nab the villian, the girl's phony uncle who's been after the formula from the start. Mack brings in the formula and the girl burns it for the good of humanity.

At the windup, Mack gets his fee, plus bonus money for the group of thugs he has dispatched along the way. When the girl appears to be "going soft" on him he rejects her. (Instant cliche: "I'm off dames; they don't go well with my business.") And finally, in what was to become the classic (and shopworn) tradition of the private eye, Mack goes on to the next case, a free-lance gun for hire.

Terry Mack's ability with weapons ties in directly to the western gunman when Daly has him brag: "I can shoot in a split second in an open draw — none faster. I'll pull a gun with anyone, even if he comes from the cow country."

WHEN DALY CREATED RACE WILLIAMS in the shadow of Terry Mack he utilized exactly the same language and approach — and there's little doubt that the lurid adventures of Daly's super-tough eye influenced many other pulp writers in the creation of a legion of gut-busting detectives. In the beginning, however, even the editors of *Black Mask* were hard put to describe Daly's new hero. A Daly story would be blurbéd with reference to "the queer character . . . who preys on the leading lights of the underworld."

In truth, Carroll John Daly was a "queer character" on his own. (In the 1920s, one must realize, the word "queer" did not carry its present-day connotation). He was thirty-three when he created the Mack/Williams prototype private eye, describing himself as "blue-eyed and brown-haired." (At five feet nine inches, he once convinced editor Joe Shaw that he stood over six feet, since he knew that Shaw favored six-footers in *Black Mask*.) The son of Mary L. (Brennan) Daly and Joseph F. Daly, he was born in Yonkers, New York, on September 14, 1889 and, as he put it, "attended half the prep schools in the state, with a fling at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts."

He studied law ("a short stint") and stenography, but gravitated toward theater work. Frank Gruber, who met Daly at a *Black Mask* Christmas party in 1937, later recalled that Daly was "first an usher,

then an assistant manager in a motion picture house. He had tried acting, but didn't like it." Daly eventually owned and operated the first moving picture theater on the boardwalk in Atlantic City.

In his 1967 memoir, *The Pulp Jungle*, Gruber recounts a "hilarious evening" wherein he listened to Daly "tell about his experiences as a 'receiver' for a bankrupt trunk company. Daly's uncle, a famous attorney, who was very influential in New York politics, got him this political plum — [which is] what 'receiverships' were in the Tammany Hall days."

It was this same generous uncle who helped launch Daly's writing career by financing his early efforts at the typewriter. Daly sold his first crime story, "Dolly," to *Black Mask* in 1922 — and in response to an editorial request for "colorful biographical data" he laid claim to having lived through several wild global adventures as a poverty-stricken youth: "I have been broke on the very edge of the Sahara Desert in Africa," he declared. "I have seen Paris on a thousand dollars a week and a week later seen London on eight dollars, and that eight borrowed from a friend."

In reviewing Daly's reclusive personality one seriously questions the validity of such "colorful" recollections. In this instance, to please his readers, Daly was likely stressing fancy over fact.

Factually, however, it is known that in 1913, at the age of twenty-four, he married Margaret G. Blakely, and that they had one son, Jack.

The Dalys settled in White Plains, New York, in a row of identical houses. Daly had trouble locating his particular house after one of his infrequent trips into town. He walked to a door, rang the bell, and asked the woman who answered if she knew where Carroll John Daly lived. She stared at him. "But . . . you're Carroll John Daly!" With ruffled dignity, he told her: "I know who I am, madam. I am merely attempting to find out where I live!"

Erle Stanley Gardner, who knew him quite well in those pulp years, wrote with amused affection of Daly's hermit-like existence in White Plains. "I always felt that he used Race Williams as a means of satisfying subconscious impulses which he knew could never be gratified in real life. He . . . wanted no part of the rough and tumble. Only on rare occasions could he be tempted to go to New York. It was a major undertaking for him."

In winter, Daly could shut himself away for several months, making certain that the inside house-temperature did not vary more than one degree. When Gardner chided him about such habits, Daly replied: "You say I'm not an outdoor man . . . I'll have you know that when the

sun shines I think nothing of going out and walking the full width of this lot — and it is a 50-foot lot!"

DALY'S WORLD OF CRIME AND VIOLENCE was purely imaginary; he had never had the slightest experience with actual crime or criminals, but once made up his mind to buy a .45 automatic. Since Race Williams was always killing hoods with his two big .45s, Daly felt he should know what one was like. He purchased the gun and, on his way home, was promptly arrested for carrying a concealed weapon. As one friend observed: "That was the end of Carroll's criminal research."

Race Williams laughed at pain, sustaining many bullet wounds, cuts and bruises in his savage career. ("The docs had plenty of work . . . in addition to the lead in me, there were two knife wounds . . . They used up nearly a spool of thread sewing me up.") In real-life contrast, Daly refused to have his teeth fixed due to his fear of dentists. His wife, according to Gruber, was continually after him about this, but Daly remained stubbornly and safely at home.

A photo from this period reveals Daly as a hesitant, mousy-looking man in oversize golf knickers, who wore round, steel-rimmed spectacles above a wispy moustache. Yet he found emotional release in absorbing his shy personality into the harsh toughness of Race Williams. Daly identified himself closely with his fictional creation, and once admitted (in a 1927 issue of *Black Mask*) that he was "Carroll John Daly in the daytime and Race Williams at night." (Daly always did his pulp writing from midnight until six in the morning, and claimed that it was as exhausting as "digging for coal in a mine.")

He would speak of Williams as one speaks of an alter ego: "I put him in need of money, hand him a situation and let him work out his own salvation. It's up to him. We live on the fat of the land or starve together . . . As for the opinions of Race Williams, they are his own and I make no apologies for his sentiments . . . He stands five feet eleven and a half, weighs 183 pounds and is thirty years old. His hair is dark brown and his eyes are black . . . he admires a clever woman and respects a good one — when he finds her. There is nothing soft-boiled about him."

Indeed there was not. Race was never weaponless at night: "I don't shove a gun under my pillow — I sleep with one in my hand." By day, he always packed his twin .45s, and didn't mind who knew it: "I leaned slightly forward so . . . he got the flash of the two guns — one under each arm. Then I said simply, 'When you put Race Williams out of a rat trap like this, you'll put him out in a cloud of smoke.'"

But Race did more than bluff; he loved sending bullets into bad guys:

- "Just as clean as a whistle I had pulled and shot him straight between his bloodshot eyes." (from "Knights of the Open Palm")
- "When I fired, his right eye disappeared, giving place to a gaping, vacant hole [and] his huge body took a nose-dive down the stairs — and his soul into hell." (from "The Super-Devil")
- "My bullet crashed home. There was a tiny black hole in the whiteness of his face . . . If hell wasn't all filled up, here was another customer." (from "Blind Alleys")
- "I jerked my right hand down and fired . . . and he clicked his heels together and pitched forward on his face." (from "The Death Trap")
- "The masked figure never had a chance. I laid a bullet smack between his eyes." (from "The Silver Eagle")
- "I don't waste my lead — one shot was all I needed. The gold-rimmed glasses snapped right across the bridge of his nose . . . and he slipped to his knees, pitching forward . . . He'd passed out like a piece of boarding house soap on a Saturday night." (from "Alias Buttercup")
- "My left gun barks once . . . and Haddock tumbles from the roof with my bullet an eighth of an inch from his heart." (from "Say It With Lead!")
- "My left hand flashed up . . . His face was almost against my gun when I closed my finger and blasted away. Blasted was right. The face was . . . gone forever." (from "Gunman's Gallows")

- "Both my guns had spoken . . . and, so help me God, but a single hole appeared in Lutz's forehead. I've done a deal of shooting in my day — mighty fine shooting — but never anything like this." (from "I'll Tell the World.")

Since Race killed at least one man during each case, the blood-hungry detective's score, after more than two decades in the pulps, ran into the hundreds. He never had second thoughts about running up this incredible death toll; in fact, he was proud of his record. He was "cleaning out the rats."

In a 1927 "interview" in *Black Mask*, Daly allowed Race to expound on his vigilante approach to justice:

"Williams: . . . I began to realize that there was a crying need for somebody to fight the crooks with their own weapons . . . the law is too cumbersome, too full of loopholes to be of much use. The only real answer to a lot of gunmen is the gun — someone a little quicker on the trigger than they are."

Many readers agreed. Typical of their reaction is this comment from an enthusiastic female: "Race appeals to me. If anything makes me tired, it is the milk and water blood of the modern hero as depicted by writers who are scared to admit that blood is *red* . . . You get me."

Editors at *Black Mask* (beginning with George W. Sutton, Jr., who bought Daly's first story, and continuing through the 20's into the 30's with Phil Cody, Harry North and the legendary Joseph T. Shaw) admitted that Race Williams on the cover meant a 15% jump in sales. Shaw privately detested Daly's crude writing, refusing to include a Daly story in the *Black Mask* anthology which he later edited [*The Hard-Boiled Omnibus*, Simon and Schuster, 1946] but was forced to keep buying his work due to reader demand. With Dashiell Hammett and Erle Stanley Gardner, Daly was ranked as one of the magazine's "top three" in popularity.

Ex-Pinkerton operative Hammett, like Daly, developed his hard-boiled writing career in the pages of *Black Mask*, creating his first famous character, The Continental Op, in an October 1923 issue. This was just four months after Race Williams had appeared in this magazine. It is extremely doubtful, however, that Daly's unlettered, pseudo-tough prose had any influence on the Hammett Op series.

Dashiell Hammett's toughness was genuine; it came out of life as he had lived it. Daly was tough only in his mind and on the printed page. Also, it should be noted that Hammett had been writing tough fiction for over a year before creating the Op — having sold his first *Black Mask* story, "The Road Home," in mid-1922.

Hammett was, of course, a fine writer who kept getting better. Daly never improved. While Hammett's 1930 masterpiece, "The Maltese Falcon," was being serialized in *Black Mask* Daly also had a serial, "Tainted Power" running in the magazine. It featured one of his most overblown characters: Florence Drummond, called The Flame. She had a passionate yen for Race Williams, but poor Flo possessed "a criminal mind" — and Race kept rejecting her. She attempts to corrupt him with power in this incredible stilted plea:

"Oh, I've used men . . . My mind guided me — that criminal mind . . . There's never been a man who held me in his arms and kissed me who hasn't come back and back and back. Moths! Moths! Moths [to The Flame] . . . but my love for you has been . . . different. And now, Race, I can offer you . . . power. I can take the world's greatest racket and lay it at your feet. Me — a slip of a girl — The Flame . . . I want you. I love you . . . Race — Race."

But Williams will have no part of her offer: "I don't want to love the woman who is The Flame."

Actually, Race didn't want to love *any* woman. Daly was never a sexual writer, and Race Williams always steered clear of romantic and/or sexual engagements. ("Women mean nothing in my life.") The Flame never caught him — although she kept trying over the years — through several hokum-packed novelets and serials.

AS THE HARSH REALITIES OF WORLD WAR II matured the nation the editorial tide turned against Daly. Readers could no longer accept his hokey, simplistic approach; the better pulps began rejecting his work. No Race Williams story was printed in *Black Mask* after 1934, and although Daly was able to peddle Williams to other pulp markets through the 30s he faced solid editorial resistance by the mid-40s. (Daly's final Race Williams novel was published in 1940.)

In a rejection letter from this period, Mike Tilden (who edited *Detective Tales* and *Dime Mystery*) declared that he was attempting to

upgrade the magazines, and that Daly's work was "a good deal too much along the old slam-bang, straight woodpulp formula."

It is ironic to note that as Daly began to fade from public favor, another hard-boiled crime writer was making a fortune from a character one critic described as "a bloated caricature of Race Williams." That character was Mickey Spillane's sadistic private eye Mike Hammer — first seen in *I, the Jury* in 1947. Years later Spillane admitted that Daly was his favorite pulp writer and that Race Williams had indeed inspired him in the creation of Hammer. Gardner, too, picked up on this: "Williams could well have been the parent of Mike Hammer. In fact, there are such startling resemblances that one can certainly see a family relationship."

The cold-blooded brutality of Spillane's private eye was a direct extension of Daly's work. Quoting Williams:

"I swung my gun down and up . . . and beat him to his knees. Then I side-swiped my gun across his face . . ."

"Put your hand on me again, and I'll spray all your teeth down your throat . . . Meet violence with violence. That's the way I like to play."

Daly also had Williams declare in "The Book of the Dead": "When you're hunting the top guy you have to kick aside — or shoot aside — the gunmen he hires. You can't make hamburger without grinding up a little meat."

Spillane directly adapted this kind of personalized gun-justice in his gore-splattered novels. Hammer, like Williams, operated as a one-man judge and jury, a mobile killing machine who (again, like Williams) hated the "Commies" and who played the role of a super-patriot out to exterminate those *he* decided were a threat to the American way of life.

Critic Philip Durham, writing about Daly, commented on the fact that "foreigners from all of Asia and most of Europe were [to Williams] villains per se."

Daly was never happy about the Spillane situation. "I'm broke and he gets rich writing about *my* detective."

Of course, Daly overlooked the fact that Spillane had added the element of raw sexuality to his Hammer books, and there is no doubt that Mike Hammer would have had the Flame stripped and bedded down in

the first chapter! Also, the Spillane style, while primitive in comparison to Chandler's, was swift and savage melodrama, craftily adapted to fit the post-war era.

Daly's final years were sad ones. Frank Gruber lived close to the Daly family, and would often drop by for bridge games. "He talked much of the old days when his stuff was in demand," recounted Gruber. "He had developed a style of writing he found hard to change. He couldn't adapt. He finally left New York and moved to California [where he attempted to break into television without success]. He lived for a while in Santa Monica . . . then he and his wife moved to the desert. Toward the end of his life he was reduced to writing for the comic books."

In mid-January of 1958, at the age of sixty-eight, Carroll John Daly died quietly at his home in California. No critical tributes marked his passing. Despite the fact that his work had appeared in 71 issues of the influential *Black Mask* (in comparison to Hammett's appearances in 52 issues), Daly died a forgotten man who had never been able to rise above the level of a pulpwood hack.

The father of the hard-boiled detective was ultimately defeated by his own severe limitations.



MYSTERY MAKERS

Continued from page 68

L.J. WASHBURN (*The Singer At Dawn*) is one of the growing number of mystery writers from Texas, her home being the small town of Azle. *The Lord Provides*, in the June MSMM, was her first published story. An avid reader, any time not spent writing or taking care of her husband and their cats she usually spends building shelves for an ever-increasing library.

Come October 10-12, mystery makers and mystery readers will converge upon the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. for the Eleventh Annual Anthony Boucher Memorial Mystery Convention. The Bouchercon XI will have as guest of honor Gregory McDonald, MWA Edgar-award-winning author of the *Fletch* novels, *Flynn*, and the new *Who Took Toby Rinaldi?* Membership fee for the entire weekend is \$15.00. To register and/or get more information, write: BOUCHERCON XI, 1299 National Press Building, Washington, DC 20045.

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2099

Why does a fireman wear red suspenders? To keep his pants up, you'd probably answer, echoing an old riddle that was popular in the early years of the last century. But Barnabus Rex had a different answer!

The Daltonic Fireman

by EDWARD D. HOCH

I'D BEEN SUMMONED TO THE MID-AMERICA LAUNCH CENTER by its director of operations, a white-haired man named Ben Frilay, who had a problem. It was always an impressive place to visit, with its rows of launch vehicles at the ready, waiting to blast off in a day or two or three for destinations as close as the moon colonies or as distant as the planets of Barnard's star. It made me aware of all the people who wanted to escape our crowded planet.

"Barnabus Rex, the solver of scientific riddles?"

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"Correct," I acknowledged. "And you would be Ben Frilay."

He ran a nervous hand through his long white mane. "This may be a bit out of your line — "

"If there's a riddle to be solved, I'm always interested."

"It's one of our firemen here at the Launch Center. He's taken to wearing red suspenders."

"What's so unusual about that?"

"Well, you've probably noticed we all wear green. Green is the earth color, and it's becoming something of a symbol with us. It's the last color departing spacemen see, and the first color they see on returning. These criss-crossed suspenders don't really hold up our uniform — their function is purely decorative. But three times in recent weeks a chief fireman named Scott Amberson has come on duty wearing *red* suspenders! We've had to send him back to change each time. He's been embarrassed by it, but has refused any explanation."

"Is he on duty now?"

"I'm not certain of his schedule. We can go see." He led me along a polished metal corridor that connected the office with Firing Control. "You understand the reason for my concern. If Amberson has mental problems it's essential we discover them at once. We can't have an unbalanced fireman launching ships into outer space. One false estimate, a single miscalculation, could cost us the lives of hundreds of people."

"Of course," I agreed, letting my gaze shift to a trim young female fireman who'd just left Firing Control and passed us in the corridor.

Once we entered the massive central chamber with its control consoles and hologram viewing screens I saw that fully half the on-duty firemen were women, working the colored buttons and knobs before them with all the skill of the men. A fireman was an occupation perhaps unique to the demands of 21st Century space travel, though certainly it had its roots in the professions of the previous century's air traffic controllers and moon launch experts. In those days a fireman had been a person who fought fires — a fire fighter — rather than one who fired the great rockets for their voyage across space. Oddly enough, women didn't object to being called firemen, so long as their pay and working conditions were identical with those of the males.

"Is Scott Amberson on duty?" Frilay asked one of the young women.

"Not till four. He's on evenings this week."

Frilay turned to me. "We'll have to visit him in his quarters."

"He lives here on base?"

"Most of our firemen do — the unmarried ones, at least — because of the duty hours. He shares a room with an apprentice fireman named Sussex."

"Not a woman, I hope."

Frilay looked startled at the suggestion. "No, no — the sexes are strictly segregated in the living quarters. We have enough trouble as it is."

I followed him into an elevator that lifted us effortlessly to the living quarters in a matter of a few seconds. But here too we were in for a disappointment. Scott Amberson had stepped out for a moment. His roommate, Tony Sussex, offered us chairs and a cold beer. We accepted the chairs but declined the beers.

"I hope Scott's not in trouble," he said, trying to get a rise out of Frilay.

"Amberson's one of the best firemen we have," the director said.

"But you're concerned about that suspender business."

"Naturally. Any erratic act by a fireman causes concern. Has he spoken to you about it?"

Tony Sussex shook his head. "I wouldn't even have known it happened except for bar gossip." There was a noise at the door. "I think this is him now."

Scott Amberson was a man in his mid-thirties — perhaps ten years older than Sussex. He was handsome enough to have attracted the attention of the women firemen, but right at the moment his face reflected the sudden concern of finding the operations director waiting in his room with a stranger.

"Scott, this is Barnabus Rex."

Amberson eyed me uncertainly. "A doctor?"

"Nothing like that," I assured him. "I'm more of an investigator. I solve scientific riddles."

"Is that what I've become?"

"Not necessarily." I glanced at the other two. "Is there somewhere we could talk alone?"

"Stay right here," Sussex said. "I was going out anyway."

"And I'll be in my office," Ben Frilay told me. "Stop by when you're finished."

Once we were alone, Amberson seemed to relax a bit. "It's about the suspenders, isn't it?"

"Yes. The operations director is naturally concerned."

"Naturally."

"Can you offer any explanation for your behavior?"

He shook his head. "None."

"Did you deliberately wear those red suspenders against the orders of the director?"

"I have nothing to say about it."

I stood up. "May I see the drawer where your uniforms are kept?"

"Right here." He pressed a release button on the top of his dresser and the drawer rolled silently out. I stared at the neatly folded green suits with their darker green decorative suspenders.

"Do you have any red suspenders?"

"For off-duty wear only. They're kept in a separate drawer."

"I see. Tell me something, Scott — how much are you paid as a fireman?"

"The standard fifty thousand. It's a very good position, much sought after."

"I imagine it is."

"What will they do about me?"

"I suppose it depends upon my report."

His eyes were pleading. "The job means a great deal."

"You know what the trouble is, don't you?"

"Yes."

"You suffer from a rare malady called daltonism — red-green color blindness. It was rare in the last century, when it was a favorite fictional device of mystery story writers, and it's even rarer today when research into gene irregularities has reached such a high point. But it still turns up occasionally."

"You have to realize, Mr. Rex, that it doesn't interfere with my work in the slightest degree."

I remembered the colored lights on the console. "But it presents the possibility of error when those lights start flashing just before blast-off."

"No, no," he insisted. "I've memorized all the positions. When a light flashes I know at once whether it's supposed to be red or green!"

"Still, the director of operations must be told. It's his decision to make."

"I suppose so," Amberson agreed.

"I'll do what I can for you," I promised, and left him alone in his room.

BEN FRILAY WAS WAITING FOR ME IN HIS OFFICE. "Had any success, Mr. Rex?"

"A great deal. Your riddle is solved."

"Solved!"

"Why does a fireman wear red suspenders? Because he suffers from daltonism, a form of red-green color blindness."

"My God! I never thought of that!"

"People don't think of it very often these days, because it's become so rare."

"The launch lights! How does he manage it?"

"Claims he has the positions memorized. Chances are he's as skilled as any of your other firemen. And as safe."

"But the red suspenders — "

"Ah, yes — the red suspenders. He keeps them in a separate drawer from his green ones, you know. It's impossible to suppose he could make the mistake three times in a matter weeks after going through several years without that sort of slip-up."

"But he *did* make the mistake! That's why I called you in!"

I shook my head. "Somebody made it for him. Somebody deliberately substituted the red suspenders for the green ones in his drawer on those three occasions, knowing he couldn't tell the difference. And that somebody could only have been his roommate, Tony Sussex — the one person with the opportunity to make the switch and the motive for doing so."

"Motive?"

"To get Amberson's job as fireman, of course. You told me Sussex was only an apprentice, and Amberson told me the positions were much sought after. As his roommate, Sussex was in a position to discover, however accidentally, about Amberson's daltonism. He used that knowledge to his own advantage, hoping Amberson would be fired and replaced by him."

"And Amberson never suspected?"

I shrugged. "Even if he did, he could say nothing without revealing his secret."

Frilay nodded. "Barnabus Rex, you've done a fine service. You've solved the riddle after only an hour's investigation."

"What will you do with Amberson?"

"We have a promotion coming up, to a supervisory capacity where color sensitivity isn't quite so important. I think he might be just the man for it. And you can be sure he won't be replaced by Sussex."

I smiled. "I'll be on my way, then."

"Bill me for your services, Barnabus. And if we ever need you again — "

"Just call," I said, and went out the door.

Overhead, against the clear afternoon sky, a rocket was blasting off for somewhere far away.

45 A.D.»

The wine merchant Solannus had been found in bed by his wife, stabbed several times, dead. It seemed like an open and shut case — until the Emperor of Rome took an imperial hand in the proceedings!

The Singer At Dawn

by JAMES M. REASONER and L.J. WASHBURN

“YOU'D THINK THAT THE EMPEROR could do as he p-leased,” I said to one of the slaves. “All that fuss just b-because I wanted to do the morning's business in the garden.”

“Of course, Emperor,” the slave said, although I knew that he was only trying to pacify me. “Here is a proclamation that needs your signature.”

I unfurled the scroll he handed me and looked over the writing quickly. It was a simple enough proclamation concerning a new feast day for some lesser god, so I took the proffered pen from the slave and signed my name — Tiberius Claudius Drusus Nero Caesar Augustus Germanicus Britanicus, Emperor, Father of the Country, High Pontiff, and Protector of the People — in all its tiresome resplendence. I have always thought it a rather gaudy name for a stammering fool and accidental Emperor.

Affixing my imperial seal on the scroll, I waved a hand at the slave and said, "Let's get on with it. Who wants to see me today?"

"The merchant Gaius Solannus desires an audience, Caesar."

"Well, send him out here."

While I waited for the merchant, I leaned back on the garden bench and let the warm sun strike my face. Birds were soaring overhead in the blue Roman sky, and it was altogether the nicest morning I had seen in quite some time. I would have much preferred spending it working on my newest volume of history, but affairs of state must come first, or some such rubbish.

The slave announced, "Gaius Solannus."

I had never met this particular merchant before. He was a beefy person, florid of face, and he looked like a man accustomed to getting his own way. He condescended to bow before me and said, "It is an honor, Caesar."

"That's quite all right. You have a p-problem with which you wish my help?"

His face became even more crimson. "I have been cheated!" he declared heatedly. "I deal in fine wines, Emperor. Some of my product has even graced your own glorious table. But now one of my competitors conspires to damage me. Philius Maximus, a dog of a swill peddler, claims that he now has an exclusive contract with my best supplier, and that I may no longer buy wine from that vineyard."

"Is his claim grounded in fact?"

Solannus hesitated. "He went behind my back, Caesar, to secure the contract. He violated the ethics of business!"

"I know nothing of the ethics of business, if such things exist. What do you wish me to do?"

"Why, restore my contract and arrest Philius Maximus."

I motioned for my slave to bend close to me. "Is this any p-proper thing for the Emperor to do?" I asked in a whisper. "Is there nothing more p-pressing than arbitration of a squabble between merchants?"

"At the moment, sire, regrettably not."

I sighed. "Very well." Turning back to Solannus, I said, "It seems to me that as long as no actual laws were broken by this Philius Maximus, there is nothing I can do beyond suggesting that you keep a closer eye on your business in the future, Gaius Solannus. Good day."

He looked as if he wished to splutter and curse, but dared not. He bowed again, grudgingly, and took his leave. I said to the slave, "Shall we get on with the next bit of earth-shaking business?"

I WOULD HAVE PROBABLY FORGOTTEN all about the matter of conflict between Gaius Solannus and Philius Maximus had it not been brought up again the very next day by my good friend, Valerianus, who had brought me some of his new poems to read. I know more about history than poetry, but still he values my opinion, and not just because I am Emperor.

"They seem to be very lucid," I told him, after scanning them. "You have a'knack for the p-proper word, my friend."

He leaned back on a couch and helped himself to a platter of grapes. "You think I should publish them, then?"

"Oh, yes, indeed. I'm sure the p-people will enjoy reading them. The ones that can read, that is."

"I was a little surprised to find that you were not in the Senate this morning," Valerianus went on around a mouthful of grapes. "What with the new laws they're considering and all."

"New laws? This is the first I've-heard of it."

He was embarrassed by this, of course, but it was not his fault that my servants did not keep me informed about what was going on. I told him to go on and tell me about it.

"They're going to increase the penalties for public disturbance," he said. "It was all prompted by that terrible brawl yesterday afternoon."

"Brawl? What brawl?"

He sat up and related the details avidly. "I happened to see it while I was at the market. It was between two wine merchants; I believe their names were — "

"Gaius Solannus and Philius Maximus."

"Why, yes! I thought you knew nothing of it."

"Never mind. Go on."

"They began by shouting at one another, then progressed to throwing wine. It was quite a battle, Claudio. The streets ran purple."

"How did it end?"

"With both men being fined and Maximus vowing to avenge himself on Solannus. It was quite a spectacle while it lasted, my friend. Not quite up to the old circuses that your grandmother Livia used to stage but still entertaining."

I had no doubt that Solannus had started the fight, angered as he was by my lack of action on what he considered his unfair plight. Still, we could not have merchants doing physical battle in the streets of Rome. The Senate was quite right to consider raising the penalties for such improprieties.

Valerianus and I moved on to other subjects and spent a pleasant few hours discussing both of our areas of knowledge. Again, I devoted very little time and energy to thinking about the affairs of the wine merchant Solannus. But sometimes a thing will come back to haunt on another day.

THIS TIME ALMOST A WEEK WENT BY before I again found myself entangled with the trials and tribulations of Gaius Solannus. I was at the shop of Herajanus the scribe, whose slaves were making copies of one of my histories. I had to visit Herajanus regularly, to make sure that his workers were doing satisfactory copies, concentrating on the words themselves and not cluttering up the scrolls with superfluous decorations. In the past, the work has had some gaudiness ascribed to it that was no doing of mine.

I had taken several of the scrolls and withdrawn into a little alcove to examine them. After I had been ensconced there for a few moments, a commotion in the main shop drew my attention. The shouting of a somehow familiar voice grated on my ears.

"Where is he, Herajanus? Where is that demon you call son?"

Now these were harsh words, indeed. A curtain covered the entrance to the alcove, and I parted it slightly in order to look out. The sight I saw did not surprise me overmuch.

Gaius Solannus, his face its seemingly usual shade of red, was haranguing Herajanus and seeking the whereabouts of the scribe's son, Joyanus.

"He's been skulking 'round my daughter again," Solannus roared. "I tell you, I won't have it. He's not good enough for Avilla."

Herajanus' face was tight with the control he was imposing on himself. No doubt Solannus was wealthier than the scribe, and it would not do to offend him to any great extent. Still, Herajanus was not going to stand by and hear his son slandered.

"My son is not here at present, Gaius Solannus," he said with

dignity. "And I'll thank you not to speak ill of him in my presence."

"Bah!" Solannus ejaculated. "What care I about that? All I care about is that he leave my daughter alone. When it comes time for her to marry, she will do much better than a mere scribe's son!"

If I had needed further proof that Gaius Solannus was a thoroughly unpleasant individual, I would have had it then and there. While Herajanuus and his slaves were prone to unnecessary extravagances in their work at times, he was nonetheless a fine man and a sterling subject. What little I knew of his son, having only met the lad twice, indicated that he had inherited his father's good qualities. I did not want to stand by while they were attacked and vilified by this bilious wine seller.

And yet it was not the Emperor's place to interfere in such a matter, I thought. It was an argument between private citizens, concerning nothing political or having to do with the state. It would have to be settled between themselves. I could no more intercede against Solannus now than I had taken his part earlier in the matter of Philius Maximus.

This business of being Emperor is at times trying, let me tell you.

So I held my peace and maintained my position in the alcove as Solannus continued to berate Herajanuus. I noticed that the scribe several times sent anxious glances in my direction, as if he was ashamed of the whole situation. I would have liked to reassure him that I realized Gaius Solannus' bile was no fault of his.

After several more minutes of angry words on both sides, Solannus shook a fat finger in Herajanuus' face and said, "I'll leave you with this warning, sir, and I suggest you pass it on to that whelp of yours. Unless he leaves my daughter alone, I'll not be responsible for what happens to him!"

"By the gods, do you threaten my son?"

Solannus leered. "I merely prophesy. You would do well to heed it." With that, he spun on his heel and stalked out of the establishment.

Herajanuus gave me a look of apology as I emerged from my place of concealment. "I'm sorry, my lord — " he began, but I waved him to silence.

"Don't trouble yourself. I could see that it was not your fault. Gaius Solannus seems determined to make an enemy out of all Rome."

The scribe sighed. "Would that my son heeded my advice and gave up his suit with Avilla. I certainly do not want her father related to me or my family."

"I can't blame you for that. Now, there are a few p-points I wish to make about these copies . . ."

We went on with our business, leaving the matter of Solannus where it stood, unresolved and unpleasant. I told myself that such things were not uncommon when it came to affairs of the heart and thought no more about it then. I was forcibly reminded of it, however, when Jovanus came into the shop just as I was leaving.

'He was a handsome youth, and he greeted me with a bow and a look of respect. I nodded to him and said, "Hello, Jovanus. How are you, lad?"'

"I am fine, Caesar," he replied. He turned to Herajanus and asked, "Was Gaius Solannus here earlier, Father?"

"Aye," Herajanus nodded. "And quite upset he was, too. Why do you persist in pursuing his daughter?"

"I love Avilla," Jovanus answered hotly. "Am I to give that up because her father is a fool?"

"He said that if you followed your present course of action, he would not be responsible for what happened to you."

"Did he?" I could see anger flaring in Jovanus' eyes. "And I will not be responsible for what happens to him!"

Herajanus looked shocked and said hurriedly, "Hush! Speak not of such things, my son. Do not let anger in another breed anger in you."

"Your father gives you good advice," I felt obliged to say. "Rome's noble heritage must not be polluted with thoughts of violence."

Oh, Claudius, I chided myself even as I spoke the words, such pretention from one who knows better! Murder is first and foremost in any history of Rome.

Still, it was my duty as Emperor to try to encourage law and order. Anything is better than anarchy.

Jovanus began to say something else inflammatory, but his father spoke over his words and said, "We will talk of it later, when all heads will be cooler. Have a case not to offend the Emperor with your headstrong words."

Jovanus turned to me and said, "I beg your pardon, noble Caesar. Love can make a man wild beyond his nature."

"I confess, love is something I know little about," I said, "and it seems to puzzle everyone else, too. My friend Valerianus the poet claims to understand it, but then he lies about everything else, too."

Jovanus begged leave of his father and myself and went on up to the living quarters above the shop. I gave Herajanus some final instruction and comments on the work he was doing for me and then took my leave also. I was getting tired of hearing both about and from Gaius Solannus, and I hoped that his further troubles would not concern the

Emperor, either directly or indirectly.

Of course, it didn't work out that way.

I WAS IN THE PALACE GARDEN THREE MORNINGS LATER, writing busily, when a servant brought a piece of paper to me and told me that the captain of the guard wanted my seal on it. "Well, what's it for?" I asked, rather testily.

"I believe it is an order to arrest a murderer, my lord."

"Murderer? What murderer? I've heard of no killing."

"I'm sorry, sire, but . . . I cannot read the order."

"Then give it here. We must start educating you servants properly. Gods above, Rome can't function without you. It's time you knew as much as your so-called betters."

I took the scroll from him and read it quickly. What it contained came as quite a surprise to me, and yet when I thought about it, it was not so unexpected after all.

Simply put, it was an order to arrest Jovanus, the son of Herajanus the scribe, for the murder of Solannus the wine merchant. I looked up and said, "Send the captain of the guard to me."

When the captain arrived, carrying his plumed helmet, I showed him the piece of paper and asked, "What do you know about this?"

"Why, it's an arrest order, Caesar."

"I know that. I want to know the details of this murder."

"Oh. Well, the way I understand it, sir, Gaius Solannus was found in his bed this morning by his wife. He had been stabbed several times and was dead. Young Jovanus has been heard to threaten him quite frequently, so it was decided that he must be the murderer."

"It was decided that he was the murderer, eh? Just like that? Was there no investigation? Did you question anyone?"

"Oh, yes, sir, we certainly did. We questioned Jovanus about the matter, and he freely admitted that he hated Solannus. I believe it has something to do with Solannus' daughter, sir . . ."

"Yes, I know about that. Go on."

"The lad can't account for himself at the time of the murder, which we assume was early this morning."

"What about Philius Maximus, Solannus' rival merchant. There has been trouble between them recently. Was he questioned?"

The captain hesitated. "Well . . . no, Caesar. It seemed so obvious that Jovanus was the murderer, we thought it unnecessary to question anyone else."

I have never felt comfortable chastising anyone, but now I said, "You should have thought further on this matter before deciding so

grave a thing. Murder is occasionally very simple but frequently complex." As my own family history will attest.

I spent a long moment in thought, trying to decide whether I wanted to become further involved in this messy business. I assumed that the passions of Jovanus ran hot enough to enable him to commit murder, and if he could not account for his whereabouts at the time of the killing, then his guilt would be a reasonable enough assumption. But there were other factors to muddy the waters, most notably the conflict between Solannus and Maximus. Unpleasant though it might be, the whole matter needed further looking into.

"Bring Jovanus to me," I commanded the captain, "but he is not to be considered under arrest yet. Bring also his father Herajanus, and the wine merchant, Philius Maximus. I wish to speak to them and to anyone else having knowledge of this affair. You said that Solannus' body was discovered by his wife?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, bring her along, too, and his daughter as well." I sighed. "We'll have all the characters in this p-play in, won't we?"

I HAD THEM ALL USHERED INTO THE GARDEN when they arrived. They sat on benches arranged around me, and despite my orders that Jovanus was not yet under arrest, two centurions stood watchfully behind him. Both he and his father looked apprehensive, and I didn't blame them a bit.

I got my first look at Jovanus' lady love, Avilla, and her mother, Solannus' wife, Massilia. They were both attractive women, and if I may be so bold as to say it (and of course I may; after all, I'm the Emperor), they were both too pleasant for a man like Solannus.

I also met for the first time Philius Maximus, who turned out to be a scrupulous little man with thinning hair and bad teeth. I disliked him not so much for his appearance, though, as I did for the fawning manner in which he greeted me and the looks of anger and hate that he gave everyone else. Hypocrisy is one of the things that has always annoyed me.

"Here they are, my lord," the captain of the guard said. "We await your next command."

He thought I was foolish for involving myself in what he viewed as strictly a matter for the guard. But I was used to that. Nearly all of Rome thought I was foolish for some reason or another:

"I want to question them," I said. "Bring them to me one at a time, beginning with Solannus' wife."

The captain escorted Massilia to me, and then I waved him away. At

my gesture, the lady sat down on the bench beside me and said, "It is an honor to be in your presence, Caesar."

"I'm sorry to intrude on your grief, lady," I said. "Could you tell me what happened this morning?"

She raised her chin and took a deep breath. I could not help but admire her fair features and the clearness of her blue eyes.

"I awoke at my usual hour," she said. "I knew immediately that something was wrong, but I could not quite grasp what it was. After thinking about it a moment, I realized that I heard no sounds coming from my husband's bedroom."

"You and Gaius Solannus slept in different rooms?"

"It was my habit to retire earlier than my husband and also to rise earlier. We did not like to disturb each other."

"Why was the silence from his room unusual?"

She swallowed. "If the Emperor will pardon my bluntness, my husband snored. Quite loudly sometimes."

"What did you think when you heard no snoring coming from his room?"

"I thought perhaps he had arisen unusually early and gone out. I went in to see if that was the case."

"And you found . . . ?"

Massilia's eyes closed. "He was lying on his bed. He had been stabbed several times. I am told that I screamed. I have no memory of it."

She looked quite shaken. I said hurriedly, "Now, now, that's all right. You can go back and sit with your daughter now."

She went, blinking back tears, and next I summoned Jovanus and Herajanus.

"You know that this is b-bad," I said to them.

Herajanus looked positively frightened out of his wits, but Jovanus had recovered some of his composure and courage. He said forthrightly, "I did not kill him Caesar. I will not deny that I am glad he is dead, but I swear to you that I had no hand in it."

"You should never be glad of someone's death," I said sternly. "When it is your time to leave this world, would you want someone saying that of you?"

He cast his eyes toward the stone paving of the little patio where we sat. "No, sir, I would not."

"Well, remember that. Now, where were you last night and early this morning?"

"I'd rather not say, Caesar."

"Oh, come, come. I'll have you know that this morning an order

for your arrest was brought to me, wanting only my seal. We're talking about m-murder, lad! I want to help you if I can."

"Tell him where you were," Herajanus urged his son.

Jovanus was shame-faced. "I went to visit another woman, sir. I don't want Avilla to know."

"What other woman?" His face flushed as I asked it. "A woman of the streets?"

The look on his face told me that I had guessed correctly. And I didn't blame him for not wanting Avilla to know.

"He came home early this morning," Herajanus put in. "I smelled the wine and perfume on him and berated him as he deserved, Caesar. But I know he didn't kill Solannus. He wouldn't."

"What time did you arrive at your father's house?"

"At sunrise, my lord."

I nodded thoughtfully and sent them back to their places. The captain of the guard, who had been standing behind me, leaned over to say, "Sir, this spurious story about spending the night with a woman won't stand up, especially under torture."

I started. "T-torture?"

"A highly respected tool of the law, sir."

Unfortunately, I knew whereof he spoke.

Letting that pass for the moment, I asked him, "When did Massilia find her husband's body?"

"An hour after sunrise."

"She heard nothing, no disturbance, before that?"

"She says not. The lad could have crept in, though, and muffled any outcry of Gaius Solannus as he stabbed him."

"Herajanus has said that Jovanus came home as the sun was rising," I mused.

"The boy's father would lie for him, surely."

"Would lie to the Emperor?"

The captain raised an eyebrow. After a moment, he went on, "Even if we do accept their stories, that still does not convince me of Jovanus' innocence. He could have done the deed earlier, on his way home, and left the body to be discovered later by Massilia."

I nodded. "Yes, I suppose he could have."

I summoned Philius Maximus to approach me. He came up bowing and scraping, and my dislike for him grew. He said, "How can I assist you in this matter, glorious Caesar?"

Now, no one in Rome could ever be accused of thinking Claudius glorious, which didn't bother me. Most of the time I was left alone to do as I pleased. Appearing foolish has its advantages. But it angered

me for Maximus to think that I would be taken in by his oily charm. I said as sharply as I could manage, "Philius Maximus, where were you last night and this morning?"

"Why, I was at home, sir, with my dear wife and children."

"They'll attest to that?"

"I am certain they will."

"You and Gaius Solannus were enemies, were you not?"

He spread his hands. "Oh, no, not enemies. Competitors, that is all."

"He claimed you stole a contract from him. The two of you brawled in the streets."

"Mere misunderstandings." He shrugged. "Such things happen in business."

"Did you not wish him dead?"

"Of course not." The glint in his eyes belied his words. "I mourn his passing and wish his murderer brought to justice."

I waved him back to his bench impatiently, then turned to the captain once more. "Still convinced Jovanus is guilty?"

"The merchant has witnesses to prove his whereabouts during the time in question."

"If a father will lie for a son, a wife will lie for a husband."

The captain began to look troubled. My words were logical, despite the low opinion all the guards held of me. We both turned to look at the group of people in the garden.

Something was troubling my mind as my eyes swept over them. Herajanus still looked very worried, as well he might, with his son under suspicion. Jovanus, though, still appeared slightly defiant, as if confident of his innocence. He had contrived somehow to move closer to Avilla, and I could tell by the look on his face that he wished nothing more at the moment than to reach out and touch her. There was concern for her in his eyes. It was justified. The girl was very broken up by the death of her father. I had not liked Solannus, but I suppose every father has his virtues. I never knew my father Drusus. He died of gangrene while leading his legions in Germany, while I was but a babe.

Massilia was sitting next to her daughter, her face still tightly under control, as if she wished none of her true feelings to show through. Some people are like that, preferring to bury their grief under layers of numbed emotion.

Philius Maximus, on the other hand, was making no secret of his feelings. He was smirking at all these goings on, no doubt reveling in the death of his rival. Yes, indeed, I thought to myself, there was the

man to watch. There was a man who would commit murder. And enjoy the aftermath.

Yet, until something different could be proved, the most likely suspect was Jovanus, and I saw that I had no choice but to approve the order for his arrest. He would be tried in the Senate and found guilty, in all likelihood, followed by execution or exile.

I raised my hand to the captain of the guard and opened my mouth to give the order, but before any words could issue forth, a bird suddenly burst into song in one of the fig trees. I remembered something I had not thought of in a long time, and I stopped my gesture where it was. The captain said, "You wanted something, my lord?"

"No, no." I felt myself becoming excited. "I must have a moment to think."

Thoughts were suddenly swirling through my head, bringing excitement and sorrow at the same time. The solution that had come to me was possible, it had to be, if everyone was telling the truth. Everyone but one . . .

They all stared at my agitation, wondering if I was going to have one of my fits. After several long moments, I raised my head and told the captain, "Bring the lady to me again."

He fetched Massilia and led her before me again. I said, "I offer you my apologies once more. I would like to ask you another question. You said your husband snored loudly?"

She looked puzzled at my words, but she said, "Very loudly. Even though we had separate rooms, I could still hear him quite plainly. I heard him every morning when I woke up. Until this morning." Her face tensed momentarily, as her emotional control slipped.

"Was he a good husband?"

"Oh, yes."

"I believe you are lying, madame."

She looked shocked. A reply that was probably angry came to her lips, but she bit it back. She said instead, "I don't know why you would say such a thing, Caesar."

"Because you've already lied about one thing. Do you think Jovanus killed your husband?"

"Yes, of course. He threatened my husband several times."

"Then he must have done it before dawn," I said. "His father can swear that he came home at dawn, and I believe Herajanus."

"How does that make me a liar?"

"Because if he had killed your husband before dawn, you wouldn't have slept until an hour after sunrise, no matter how quietly he did it."

The captain ventured to say, "Begging the Emperor's pardon, but

you're not making sense, sir."

I sighed, then tried to explain as best I could. "When I first became Emperor and came to live here, I was awakened every morning by an infernal bird who began to sing just as the sun came up. At first it annoyed me greatly and woke me every morning without fail. I became accustomed to it gradually, however, and it woke me less and less. Finally, it didn't wake me at all. Until one morning when I was shaken out of a sound sleep by the fact that the garden was absolutely quiet. The bird was gone, who knows where, and it never sang at dawn again. Blasted thing! It took me weeks to get used to the silence again."

I looked up at Massilia and saw that she knew what I was talking about. She had given herself away by admitting that Solannus snored loudly and then claiming that she did not awaken until her usual hour. If Jovanus had killed Solannus before dawn, the ceasing of the snores would surely have awakened Massilia earlier.

I said as much, as rapidly as I could, and the captain looked extremely dubious. "That's no proof of anything, sir."

I gazed at the mask that was Massilia's face and knew now why she had to exercise such control over it. She hadn't wanted to give her guilt away. Without taking my eyes off her, I said to the captain, "Then find the proof. Talk to their slaves. Perhaps Solannus beat her, or was unfaithful. Gods above, he was unpleasant enough to have done almost anything. Use your brain, man. Murder demands a better investigation than this one received."

As he turned to go, I added, "And take those centurions with you."

I sent them all away then, all but Massilia. Herajanus was thankful, Jovanus was solicitous of Avilla, and Maximus looked more satisfied than ever. That was a shame, but there was nothing I could do about it. Nothing but resolve to have my officers keep a close eye on him in the future, watchful for any infraction of the law by which we might deal with him.

When they had all gone, I said gently to Massilia, "The captain will find the proof he needs, you know. He's not too bright, but he is determined."

Her attractive face was sad, and I knew it mirrored my own. "He was such a beast," she said. "I couldn't stand it anymore. I wouldn't have minded his indiscretions so much if he hadn't flaunted them to me. Oh, yes, there are many things my slaves can tell."

"I couldn't let the boy be convicted for something he didn't do."

She smiled wryly. "I know. You're a good Emperor. You take care of your subjects. You accept responsibility well."

"Perhaps," I said. "But I certainly didn't ask for the job." ●

1935

The office was a mess. Worse, there was a dead body in the editor's chair!

Death of a Pulpster

by MIKE TAYLOR

DECEMBER 1935 WAS A PRETTY FAIR MONTH. I'd sold a pair of long novelettes to the Standard chain and a short to *Operator #5*. Payment on acceptance for all three. I'd paid up the back rent, filled the cupboard and icebox, gotten my grandfather's watch and cuff-links out of hock. I was feeling smug. After eight months of near starvation I had finally cracked the pulp market.

Most of all though, I was proud of the series I had going with Street and Smith. My Dan Dolan character was a poor man's Sam Spade — more action, less sense — but he was starting to get some good reader response. They were taking a ten thousand word novelette every other week. At a penny a word. There's something prestigious about a series — also, it's about as close to security as a writer can get.

On the Tuesday before Christmas Walt Morrell and I made the rounds of all the editors we were selling to, cadging a holiday drink from each one and checking for upcoming work. Walt and I had arrived in New York at more or less the same time, both midwesterners, Walt from Chicago, me from a little town west of St. Louis. Two young, unpublished writers, each with a second-hand portable typewriter and a cardboard suitcase. We were fleeing the depression and its grinding poverty, determined to make it big writing for the pulps. We propped one another up through the long, struggling months. When you've shared your last can of beans with someone, a sort of battlefield closeness develops.

We had just left Rogers Terrill at the Popular offices over on East 42nd Street and were waiting to catch the subway back to our fleabag hotel. It was bitterly cold and the leaden sky promised snow.

I had started down the ice-rimmed steps when Walt said, "Hey! Let's drop in on old Emil Curtain while we're on this side of town."

"What for?" The idea surprised me.

"Even a skinflint like him must have an office bottle. We'll hit him up for a belt. He owes us that much at least."

Emil Curtain ran a shoestring group of pulps that included a couple of low grade detective magazines. He was notorious for lousy rates and late payments. Writers sent him their work only after it had been rejected everywhere else. I knew he owed Walt for several stories which had already appeared.

"All right. Why not? I've been tossed out of better places."

So we turned around and marched over to Curtain's offices in a rundown building off Fifth Avenue. They were on the third floor, at the end of a long corridor that smelled like a ship's hold.

Walt rapped on a frosted glass door with the legend CURTAIN PUBLICATIONS. No answer. I tried the knob and found it unlocked.

"Let's go in," Walt said. "He's so tight he's probably afraid to answer the door for fear it's the Salvation Army."

In we went. There was no one in the small waiting room. Made bold by the rosy glow from our previous stops, we barged on through into the publisher's office.

It turned out old Emil had an even better reason than stinginess for not answering the door. He was dead.

The place looked like it had been hit by a cyclone. Chairs overturned, wastebaskets spilling their contents across the floor, a great pile of papers strewn on and around a battered mahogany desk. Curtain's body was sprawled in a reclining chair behind the desk. It wouldn't take an autopsy to determine the cause of death. The head was twisted back at an unnatural angle and there were ugly purple bruises on the throat. A poorly-made hairpiece hung wildly askew over one ear.

Walt made a croaking noise while I felt a moment of dizzy unreality. It's one thing to write blithely of grisly homocides; actually sharing the room with a dead man is another matter. Then it passed, and I moved around the desk to do the obligatory check for a pulse. His wrist was ice-cold.

"Whew!" Walt said. "I thought I hated the old tightwad, but this — ugh!"

"I know." I stared around the room. "I wonder who did him in."

Walt said in his best radio announcer's over-voice, "Sounds like a job for Dan Dolan, Private Investigator."

"Oh, pipe down." He twitted me a good deal about my creation — especially since last Halloween, when I had been unwise enough to don a private eye get-up for a costume party hosted by the Fiction Guild.

I picked up a handful of the papers scattered across the desk. "Hey! These are all manuscript pages. Looks like he struggled with the killer and they knocked over the slush pile."

"Too cheap to hire a first reader," Walt muttered. "Well, I guess we'd better call the law."

DETECTIVE SERGEANT EUGENE HARMON WAS BIG, RUMPLED, pleasant, and painfully methodical. The first half hour he was in the room he measured, chalked and studied every possible angle in relation to the body. He reminded me of a carpenter. Then the police photographer went through a roll of film following his directions. When Harmon had cataloged all the physical evidence and the medical examiner had removed the remains, he got around to questioning us. He made it seem very informal, keeping us together.

"I'll bet it was a writer that killed him," Walt ventured. "The question is: which one? There aren't more than a hundred with good motives. Including me. He was behind on his payments to everybody I know."

"You fellows are both writers, I take it," Harmon said. "He owed you money?"

Walt nodded.

"Not me," I said. "I blush to admit it, but most of my early stuff was so bad even Curtain wouldn't touch it."

(It's amazing how blasé a guy becomes after he's sold a few stories — six months earlier such an admission would have cut me to the quick).

Harmon stroked his chin. "I don't suppose either or both of you killed him?"

Walt snorted. I laughed.

"No, I guess not. Well, it's pretty obvious it was a spur-of-the-moment thing. Ninety-nine percent of these strangulation murders are — it's not a very efficient way to croak somebody. The way I see it Curtain had a visitor, they argued, the guy lost his temper and got him by the neck. Make sense?"

I shrugged. "Sure. Would it be going out on a limb to suggest the murderer was a man, a reasonably big, powerful man?"

Harmon sighed. "Amateur detectives! Yeah, the spacing of the bruises and the fact that the neck was broken tend to support that theory. Well, I've got a lot of work to do. I'll have your statements typed up — make sure you stop by the precinct tomorrow morning and sign them."

As Harmon and the uniformed patrolman started to leave, I had a

thought. "Sergeant? If you're finished here, do you mind if we gather up these manuscripts? I'll try to get them back to the owners before they end up in the trash."

He guessed it would be okay, as long as we locked up when we were done. Walt and I spent the next hour or so sorting through the scattered pages of twenty-nine separate stories. A few of them were stapled or paperclipped together; the rest had to be matched page by page.

It was tedious work, interrupted only once when Walt chuckled. "I'll be darned! Here's one of mine. I'd forgotten all about it."

Most of the manuscripts were by New York writers; I recognized quite a few of the names. There were several self-addressed manila envelopes from out-of-towners which I matched up with names on the stories. Then we were finished — almost.

"That's funny," Walt said.

"What?"

"I've got an extra sheet here. The last page of something called "Revenge of the Tongs" by Berwyn W. Cross, so it says on the heading. A likely name. I can't find the rest of it."

I took a look. It was page 43, containing several paragraphs of purple prose that brought to a climax whatever skullduggery had gone before.

... sound of distant gunfire as Marston smashed through the screen. Chan Li pressed the gleaming blade against Nora Chambers' lovely throat. The Oriental snarled, his eyes burning like the fires of hell.

"Now she dies, white dog!" he hissed.

The American knew he had but one chance. Snatching the long-bladed hunting knife that bounced at his hip, he hurled it with a prayer and all his strength.

It took the Tong Lord squarely in the throat, severing the jugular. A brightly-coloured flower blossomed as his life's-blood spurted.

Chan Li stood frozen for an endless moment. Would his dying convulsions draw the keen edge of the blade across his captive's throat? Marston's heart stopped. Then the Chinaman sank slowly to the floor and the knife clattered harmlessly beside him.

An instant later Nora was in his arms, her

breath warm against his cheek as she shuddered against him. And Marston knew that, whatever else lay before them during their escape from the Forbidden City, things were going to be okay from now on.

THE END

"Recognize the style?" Walt asked.

"Yeah. Pure hack. It could be anybody. Even you or me. You know what I'm thinking?"

"That the guy who wrote this might be the one who killed Curtain? Then he took the manuscript so it wouldn't implicate him."

"And missed the last page. Could be. But who is this Cross? And how could the story identify him as the killer?"

"Good questions. Let's let Sergeant Harmon try to answer them."

"No," I said thoughtfully. "It's a pretty wild theory. Let's do a little digging first and see what we can find out before we take it to him."

Walt sighed. "Okay. Where do we start?"

"How about Abel Maric? He used to edit Curtain's magazines until a few months ago. I've got his autograph on a couple of rejection slips."

We packed all the manuscripts into a cardboard box and carted them back to the hotel. Then we went a-calling.

ABEL MARIC WAS A BRILLIANT, BAD-TEMPERED DWARF who had once worked for some of the big publishing houses and lived on Park Avenue. Demon rum and a penchant for young girls had reduced him to pulp editing and a tiny two-room apartment in the west sixties. He answered the door in a dressing gown though it was mid-afternoon. He reeked of Jamaica's finest. After I reminded him that we had met at a couple of the Guild's Friday luncheons he grudgingly invited us in.

"We're looking for a writer who sells to the Curtain chain," I explained while he poured himself a tot of dark liquid from an unlabeled bottle. Walt was practically licking his lips, but he ignored us. "There's a problem over authorship of a story. We hoped you might be able to help us."

"Damned jackals!" he growled. "They've already written the same story twenty times over. No talent and less scruples. So they take stories from the better markets, change the titles, the characters' names, and every third sentence, and peddle them to Emil. Which one

is it now?"

"Berwyn Cross?" Walt said hopefully.

Cross?" Maric cackled. "You boys are out of luck. That's a house name, has been for years. Emil used it to cut expenses and confuse the tax auditors. I've written some stories under it myself."

"So much for that idea," Walt muttered.

I pulled out the manuscript page and showed it to Maric. He read it quickly, scowling, and handed it back.

"Trash. Why only the last page?"

"The others were — misplaced. We're trying to locate them. Mean anything to you?"

"Nope." He looked at me strangely. "This is a rotten business. You're both young. Take my advice and get out while you can. Churning out this garbage day after day will destroy any talent you may have. It deadens the imagination — all that's left are the words, endless words, none of them meaning anything."

I guess my mouth was open. It struck me how lonely this bitter little man must be. Walt cleared his throat uncomfortably.

"Well, thanks for your time, Mr. Maric. We'll get out of your hair. If you don't mind my asking, why did you leave Curtain Publications?"

"Money," he said shortly. Then, as we rose to leave, "Try Big John Huntworth. Half-decent writer, lives over in the Bronx. He did a lot of our oriental stuff, some of it under the Cross name. He might know."

"Thanks," I said, surprised. "Thanks a lot."

"Merry Christmas," he said sourly as we left.

I FOUND JOHN HUNTWORTH IN THE DIRECTORY. That impressed me. Very few of the writers in our circle could afford a phone. I splurged a nickel and called him. Being deliberately vague, I asked if we could see him about some stories he had done. He said sure he could talk to us, come on over.

Big John Huntworth had a nice ground-level place near the river. His wife, a lovely Chinese girl, answered the door and showed us into his study. Maybe that accounted for the kind of stories he wrote.

He was at the typewriter, a big, rawboned guy, nearly bald, with a mincing smile that tried unsuccessfully to hide bad teeth. I remembered seeing him at a couple of the luncheons, but we had never talked. He was working on an old kitchen table, overflowing with stacks of typed papers. We shook hands and sat.

"I work on half a dozen stories at once," he explained, waving at

the mess. "Keeps me from bogging down in a particular plot. Now what can I do for you gentlemen?"

I trotted out the line about looking for the author of a Cross story and showed him our page. He glanced at it.

"Not mine. At least not directly."

I looked at Walt. Walt looked blank.

Huntworth laughed. "You fellas are new at this game, right? Okay, here's the way it works. I'm a word factory. I average five thousand a day. I supply probably fifty percent of everything Curtain publishes. Sometimes whole issues are made up of my stories under different names. The cheap so-and-so only pays me a penny a word."

He paused to light a Luckie. "That was all right for a while, but lately I've been hitting some of the better markets. I can't afford to write for him anymore. But rather than give up the whole thing I farm it out. Find a couple of starving writers, pay them half a cent a word on delivery to me, and feed the stories to Curtain at a penny a word. I still clear \$400 to \$500 a month and have time to write for *Blue Book* and *Dime Detective*. Sometimes I have to do a quick rewrite, but most of the stuff passes. Old Emil's not too particular."

"So most of the Cross stories are by guys working for you?"

"Right. I don't think I've done one under that name in the last six months."

"Do you keep any records?" Walt asked.

Big John favored us with a full-fledged grin, baring black and ugly stumps. "Just what I was going to suggest. I've got three youngsters working for me right now; let's see if I've got a story by that title listed for any of them."

He pulled a card file from under the stacks of paper and began thumbing through it.

"I have this vision," Walt said. "We find these three guys and learn they've farmed it out to six others at a quarter of a cent a word. And so on."

"Yeah. It's not a bad deal though. I wish I'd known about this a few months ago. We would have missed a few less meals."

Huntworth had come to the end of his file. "Sorry, men. Not on my list. Somebody else must have used the Cross name for that one."

"Any chance one of your guys could be bypassing you with his stories?"

He thought a moment. "You know, it's possible. If one of them was enterprising enough to go to Curtain and offer his stuff for three

quarters of a cent a word, the old goat might buy it. The ungrateful pups!"

"It's just a possibility," I said hastily. "Could I have their names, just in case?"

He was somewhat curious as to why we were making such a fuss over the story. I guess we finally satisfied him because he gave us the three names (G.C. Carlton, Harold K. Rivers, Raymond Miller) and even threw a holiday brandy into the bargain. By the time we left, our rosy glow restored, night was falling.

"I don't know if we're doing any good," Walt said as we trudged toward the subway. "For all we know, Big John could have done it himself and fed us those names to get us off the trail."

"I doubt it. I took a look at some of the stuff he was working on. Different typewriter from the one used on our sheet. No, I think we're on the right track. Say this is what happened: one of Huntworth's starving writers decides to sell direct to Curtain. He brings the manuscript in, they have an argument over rates or whatever, and the writer kills old Emil. He gathers up the manuscript and runs, dropping the page we found."

"Why not just leave it there? It would be one of many."

"I've been thinking about that. First off, it's under a house name and you wouldn't normally expect to find that in a slush pile. It was probably something originally written for Huntworth. Also the writer's real name was certainly on the first page for payment purposes. And if it was a spur-of-the-moment thing it would be natural for the killer to grab whatever he thought might incriminate him."

"Fine, provided it wasn't the cleaning lady or the elevator operator. What now?"

"Well, it should be possible to match the typewriter used on our sheet with the one owned by the killer."

"That's not proof."

"No, but it's a start. I think we'd better turn this whole business over to Sergeant Harmon."

"Amen," Walt murmured.

BY RIGHTS THAT SHOULD HAVE ENDED OUR INVOLVEMENT in the matter. We saw Harmon that evening, showed him page 43 of "Revenge of the Tongs," told him what we had done, laid out our brilliant deductions for him. He was duly impressed. After roasting our ears good for snooping around without his knowledge, he admitted it sounded like a reasonable approach and agreed to investigate the three writers. He even hinted that there might be a citation in it for us

if the killer was caught.

But when I called him Thursday morning, eaten up with curiosity, Harmon had bad news. "No match on the typewriter. We interviewed all three lads and checked their machines. Two Underwoods and a Smith-Corona. Our experts tell me the machine used on your page was a Royal. Nice try, though."

"I know we're right," I raved at Walt later that day. "It's obvious — the killer got home, realized he'd lost the last page and, not taking any chances, got rid of the machine. If I hadn't been so busy feeling clever I'd have realized that was likely to happen. Harmon doesn't have any other suspects. It's up to us to nail this guy."

Walt raised his eyebrows. "I just read your latest opus, but I don't think diving through a skylight is going to do it in this case."

"Har, har. Listen, something's been bothering me about that page we found. I talked Harmon into making me a copy. I practically memorized the stupid thing before it struck me. Look!"

He groaned. "That's pretty thin."

"Maybe, but it could be the key. I've got an idea. Tomorrow's the weekly luncheon . . ."

EVERY FRIDAY MEMBERS AND GUESTS of the American Fiction Guild, New York chapter, a loosely-structured organization of pulp writers, editors, and publishers, gathered for lunch at the Knickerbocker Hotel. This was a particularly festive occasion what with the holiday season. Checks had been picked up that morning and the turnout was larger than usual. A lot of toasts were being drunk. The mood was mellow and somewhat raucous.

I stared around at the gathering, still a little dazed to find myself in such august company. Fred MacIssac had just spoken pleasantly to me. A few feet away Leo Margulies and Carroll John Daly were having a good-natured editor-author wrangle over the merits of a story. Captain Joseph T. Shaw, editor of *Black Mask*, stalked through the crowds, lean and a touch menacing, not unlike the contents of his magazine. I promised myself that one day I would sell a story to him.

Walt worked his way over to where I stood, his face flushed from excitement and, I suspected, a few nips of illegal gin. "Seen our guests of honor?"

"They're here. Mingling. I don't think they suspect anything. The invitations were anonymous." My knees suddenly felt weak. "Lord, I hope this works."

He squeezed my shoulder. "So do I. Go get 'em."

I had wangled a few minutes on the schedule, supposedly for a brief

tribute to Emil Curtain, although Arthur Burks, who was Guild president, had a little trouble believing I had anything good to say about the deceased. When my time came I nearly stumbled getting up to the rostrum. Staring around at the sea of faces, I slowly picked out the three I was interested in. Big John Huntworth had pointed them out earlier.

“G.C. Carlton. Tall, gaunt-faced, hair gone prematurely gray. He wore bifocals and had a habit of wetting the tips of his fingers and running them over his eyebrows. He didn’t look like a murderer — but who did?

Harold K. Rivers. Heavy-set, boyish looking, black hair pomaded to a glossy sheen, he had nervous eyes that never stopped roving the room.

Raymond Miller. Best looking of the three, clean-cut features, athletic build, maybe a trifle dandified. The image was spoiled a little by a constant tic in one cheek.

Okay, which one? All three appeared physically capable of the act. Walt was watching expectantly; he gave me the thumbs-up sign.

“Gentlemen, if I may request your indulgence for a moment. We have devised a bit of holiday entertainment. If you would each take up pencil and a piece of paper — napkins will do — we’ll begin.” There was a murmur of surprise. I saw Mr. Burks staring darkly at me. I moved on hurriedly. “Now this is a very simple contest. Please write the following sentence: Blank is the color of Christmas. Just begin the sentence with your favorite holiday color. My associate will collect the results. Oh, yes, please include your name on the paper. I can guarantee an unusual surprise for the winner.”

There was some grumbling and a few catcalls but most of them went along with it, including our three suspects.

The next few minutes passed like a slow freight. Walt moved through the crowd, collecting all different sizes of paper, shuffling those of Carlton, Rivers and Miller to the bottom of the stack. When he brought them up and put them on the podium I noticed his hands were shaking. We could be knee-deep in trouble if this little trick backfired. I took a deep, deep breath and, setting the others aside, looked at the three pieces of paper.

G.C. Carlton had written: “Red is the color of Christmas.”

Harold Rivers had written: “Red is the colour of Christmas.”

Raymond Miller had written: “Green is the color of Christmas.”

“Sergeant Harmon,” I said to the man standing quietly at the back of the room, “you can arrest Harold Rivers for the murder of Emil Curtain.”

FORTY-FIVE MINUTES LATER, when things had gotten sorted out, we were surrounded by the whole Guild, everyone asking questions and offering congratulations at once.

"It was the British spelling, of course," I explained nonchalantly. "Turns out Rivers came over from London about two years ago. He got fed up with ghosting for Big John Huntworth and took some of his work, still under the Cross pseudonym, directly to Emil Curtain. Curtain, stingy to the end, offered only half a cent a word, which Rivers was already getting. They argued. Curtain threatened to tell Big John and cut Rivers out of the picture altogether. Apparently he went crazy and killed the old man."

"How did you get onto him?" Norvell Page asked.

"Walt found the last page of one of the manuscripts Rivers brought with him. After that it was just a matter of following up the leads . . ." I heard myself sounding like a pompous ass and shut up.

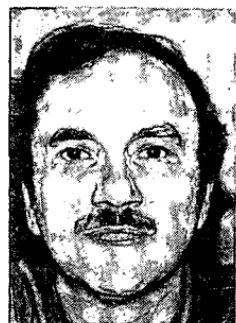
Walt grinned so wide I thought his face would split. "Gentlemen, a toast! To Dan Dolan! And the man who made him!"

Everyone laughed. Everyone drank.

The next day I started to work on the latest Dan Dolan story. I called it "The Colour of Death."

MYSTERY MAKERS Continued from page 68

MICHAEL AVALLONE (*Sweet Violets*) has been called "The fastest typewriter in the East," "The Writing Machine," "A one-man book factory." As a kid he wanted to be a G-man, an actor, a beautiful dame, a World War II aviator — all the heroic things. And he's done all of them — as a writer. He's not only prolific, he's versatile, as any catalog of his works will testify. Here's a photo of him during a rare moment — between stories!



Continued on page 112

1888

A monster walked the London streets, its identity concealed by the greatest camouflage of all!

SWEET VIOLETS

by MICHAEL AVALLONE

"I KNOW WHO JACK THE RIPPER IS," Mollie Lamkin said proudly, setting her fork down loud enough to wake the baby sleeping in the next room.

John Lamkin gazed wistfully at his cold mutton and napped his lips in conclusion. "Who, m'dear? The postman, I suppose. The young bloke who's always making sheep's eyes at you."

"Laugh if you like, Mr. Lamkin, but he does. But I'm not talking about him, love." Mollie Lamkin's eyes flashed with divine wisdom. "If I had tuppence to spare, I'd bank it all on Sutter downstairs, third floor back!"

Her husband winced. "Come off it, my girl. That swell wouldn't muss his gloves on ketchup let alone bloody knives like this Ripper customer."

"All the same, Johnnie my boy. He's always out on long walks after sundown. Stays in his room all day. No one has laid half an eye on him in all the weeks he's been here, have they?"

John Lamkin groped for his evening paper, seeking refuge of a kind. Four weeks now since the bloody business in Whitechapel. All of London seemed to think, talk and torment themselves about nothing else but the Ripper. Who is he? Where is he? When will he strike next? You'd think a working man, and a hard working one at that, could come home and eat his mutton once without the woman of the house bothering his ears about the infernal Ripper.

"All right, love," Lamkin smiled sarcastically. "You just call in the bobbies and tell them what you think. If Sutter's the Ripper, that's be an' end to it."

Mollie Lamkin clutched her breast dramatically. "You won't think it so flamin' funny if he was to kill somebody in this very house, Johnnie Lamkin!"

Her husband snorted and took out his pipe. Geography was on his side. The Ripper killed only in Whitechapel. They were safe enough in Soho Square by his lights. Let the Missus worry. Still, it was bothersome how a woman with a growing child would worry herself to death about things without first trying to reason them out.

Little Johnnie woke up and Millie Lamkin forgot all about Mr. Sutter and her infuriating husband while she changed diapers.

Half the trouble of the world was the simple fact that men never listened to their womenfolk.

DOWNSTAIRS IN A TINY ROOM ON THE THIRD FLOOR BACK, Mr. Sutter was occupied. Had the Lamkins been present, Mollie would have screamed in horror and John Lamkin would have never disagreed with his wife again. Not ever.

Mr. Sutter was dismembering a body.

The door was locked, admitting hardly any air within its closet-like confines. The shade was rolled down and all the illumination in the room was afforded by tall, thin tapers mounted on wooden chairs at either end of the place.

On the floor, crouched like something from Hell, Mr. Sutter was very busy with a surgeon's scalpel. He wore long gloves extending nearly to his elbow. A white butcher's smock pinned his round little body into square lines. His face was damp with insanity, intense. His bald skull shone fiery red in the steady gleam of the candles.

The corpse he straddled was that of a very young woman. She had

been mercifully dead for twenty minutes. At least since Mr. Sutter had lured her up to his room with promise of a five pound note and smashed her over the head with a flatiron he sometimes used to press the drab grey suit he habitually wore.

It took Mr. Sutter a full two hours to complete his handiwork. At which point, the candles guttered on their brass bases and flickered over the scene.

After which, Mr. Sutter left the room and the corpse exactly as they were, pulled a heavy machintosh over his clothes and locked the door from the outside.

Going down the gloomy stairway, he encountered no one.

When he reached the street, the gaslight was on and thick, soupy London fog was settling over the Square.

A P.C., figure tall and erect on the pavement, moved through the mists before him.

Mr. Sutter edged by with a politely muttered, "Good evening, Constable."

When questioned by his superiors the next morning, P.C. Briggs could only recollect the utter cordiality and cheeriness of Marcia Wooley's murderer. His own mother couldn't have been nicer.

MOLLIE LAMKIN DID NOT CROW TO HER HUSBAND, JOHN. The horror and the realization of the Ripper's proximity had put a zipper on her mouth. John Lamkin was unable to light his cold pipe no matter how many times he tried. His nervous fingers fumbled with matches and so many false starts.

"Mollie, speak to me. It's not your fault, my girl."

Mollie Lamkin rocked in her chair and said nothing.

"Burn me, I should have paid a mind to you." Her husband shuddered. "He'd have been caught and this terrible business over with. To think, he was right beneath our very feet all the time — goin' and comin' — in the dead of night. After doin' his bloody work — "

His wife rocked and a tormented cry bubbled for exit from her lips.

"My dear," Lamkin looked startled. "Don't carry on like this, please. There's the baby and all."

She shook her head, eyes glazed, and her pinched lips slowly forced themselves open.

"Don't — let's not talk about it, John. Not ever again. Or I'll go out of my mind — "

The whimper of her tortured voice walked like Death around the cozy flat.

MR. SUTTER FOUND LODGINGS a mere two miles from the scene of the Marcia Wooley murder. His new landlady thought him a dignified, nice gentleman and suggested a room in the back where he wouldn't be bothered by the bustle of the living room.

The landlady's husband folded his *Times* and grunted when his good wife came bouncing into the kitchen flourishing a crackling five pound note.

"Now that's what I call a proper border, Harold. A month in advance. Right on the table."

Harold concealed his satisfaction behind another grunt. "Proper chap?"

"My, yes. Ever so refined. M'am this and M'am that if you please. He strikes me as a schoolmaster of some sort."

Harold smiled openly this time. "Well and good. Better than what we've been getting, I must say. It's a wonder the Ripper hasn't turned up here, Ellie. A proper hideaway this house."

Ellie looked shocked. "Bite your tongue, Harold. The Ripper, indeed!" She glared at her husband. He cowered behind his *Times* with a facesaving rejoinder.

"All the same, girl. You can't be too careful these days."

UPSTAIRS IN HIS NEW SURROUNDINGS, Mr. Sutter made himself at home. His black bag lay open on the small table lined against the wall opposite the bed. Surgical instruments gleamed as his skilled fingers re-arranged them. It was time to make plans; to find another victim in the fog.

Now happened something that might have changed the course of criminal history had anyone been present to observe and evaluate the truth.

Mr. Sutter suddenly reached up both hands and fastened them tightly about his bald head. He adjusted his fingertips and then lifted them with a tight motion which raised the gleaming smooth pate. Long, trailing dark hair, suddenly released from the clever skull cap which held it captive, spilled down the sides of Mr. Sutter's face. Mr. Sutter was no longer bald.

Indeed, Mr. Sutter, was no longer a man . . .

The smile that the cracked mirror on the dresser gave back in reflection was ghastly. What better protection for finding another victim for the Ripper's knife than to walk the streets for prey in your true identity?

Nature had proved the greatest camouflage of them all. ●

«1944»

War is raging in Europe and the Orient, but that doesn't stop killings on the home front. Murder is as popular as ever!

Time Out For Murder

by LARRY STERNIG

“GRAPHOLOGY,” THE PROFESSOR WAS SAYING, “Is by no means a science. But, combined with a little study of elementary psychology, it is an interesting and instructive pastime —”

In the rear row of the tiny auditorium, Spencer Wood, listening attentively, was disturbed by the stealthy opening of the door behind him. The novelist turned and for the barest instant failed to recognize his former secretary, big, redhead Hal McCarty.

Hal grinned. “Uniform fool you, boss?”

“Just thought you’d be doing something more exciting on your furlough,” Spence whispered. “Sit down.”

The soldier shook his head. “When there’s a murder to solve?”

Spence grabbed his hat. “Who?”

“Judge Oliver.”

“Any clues?” Spence asked as he followed Hal out.

“Elevator boy took up a brunette dame about 8:30. Lipstick on the cigarettes in the ash tray.”

“Carlson Arms,” Hal directed. Then: “I could name you a hundred who’ll read his obituary with pleasure.”

“It’s still murder,” the grayish author of detective stories said. “And I’m agin it. That’s why I work on these cases.”

“Gratis,” Hal grunted.

“This town is blessed with an honest if overworked homicide squad. To what better purpose could I donate my spare time?”

“Fishing,” replied Hal. “Patriotic hobby during the meat shortage.”

Spence smiled dimly. He was summoning what knowledge his

memory held regarding Judge Oliver. Retired — shady — a ladies' man. Linked politically with the district attorney; Hague.

The yellow roadster stopped before the brilliantly lighted foyer of the Carlson Arms. Spence and Hal pushed through the mob of news-hounds to the desk.

Spence nodded at the excited clerk. "What room, Jimmy?"

"415. Grant's expecting you."

As they rode up, the elevator boy told them: "The dame had a veil over her face. But she was dark — Italian, maybe. Heavy on the perfume."

In 415 Inspector Grant was talking to the manager. Spence nodded to him, strode over to the stooping coroner.

White-haired Judge Oliver was slumped in a large brocaded chair, a small-caliber bullet hole in the center of his sloping forehead.

Spence glanced at the body, then at the ash tray.

"Where are the cigarette stubs?"

Inspector Grant came over. "At the chemist's. And being printed. It would be a dark girl from the lip rouge." The big man's blunt scarred face was lined with fatigue. "The judge knew more girls than Ziegfeld. But he wasn't one to glorify 'em. It'll be a case, I think."

Spence glanced at the bullet hole. "Nothing flighty about the lady. Her aim was good."

"Maybe it wasn't a gal; maybe it was a jealous suitor," Hal interjected.

"Always the romanticist," Spence said. "Well, there's probably nothing here. Nothing but that odor. What is it, Private Romeo?"

The heavy odor overrode that of tobacco and gunpowder. The redhead wrinkled his nose. "Gardenia."

Spence said musingly: "Hot, sweet and heavy. I'd like to see her handwriting."

Grant looked puzzled.

Hal explained. "Graphology. It's his latest sweetheart."

Grant said dryly, "What next?"

"Solving the crime. Any leads?"

"None. Hizzoner sent plenty over the road."

Spence was studying the ornate apartment. "The D.A. will be on your tail. Hague and Oliver were thick."

Grant looked more tired than ever. "Mmm-hmmm. Well, boys, it's getting late. See if you can dream up the answer to this mess. G'night."

Outside again, Spence turned to Hal. "Helluva way to spend your furlough. Care to see the floor show at the Oasis? My treat."

"Now you're cookin' with gas!" But as they passed a street light Hal could see the novelist's brow knitted in thought. Hal did a little thinking himself. It wasn't like the boss to be pleasure-bent when a case was on fire. He said finally: "Rosie Malone is the headliner at the Oasis. Isn't she the skirt who was sentenced by Oliver and just recently paroled?"

"The same," Spence confirmed. "But don't let it spoil your evening. Here we are."

The hat check girl smiled politely at Spence, invitingly at the brawny soldier.

The emcee, a lyric tenor, was finishing a croon as they threaded their way between the crowded tables in the wake of the headwaiter. Their own table was floorside.

Spence Wood's gray eyes roamed the smoky, noisy room.

The emcee was announcing: "And now for our singing star, the city's top notch torch singer — Miss Rose Malone!"

A girl stepped into the smoky light of the baby spots. She was dark, shapely, with that extra something. The applause was generous. Her voice was fair, but her timing put it over, and the inflection.

Hal said gruffly, "She'd kiss you or kill you for a nickel."

Spence shook his head. "Her kisses would come higher. She's a hard one."

Hal took a paper napkin and reflectively rubbed his jacket buttons. "Check. But it's common talk that she was railroaded by Oliver and Hague, the same pair who engineered her parole. Maybe she figured they were softening her up for another frame and decided to change Oliver's little plans with a bullet."

The song ended. Rosie bowed.

A bulk appeared at Spencer Wood's side. He looked up into the wide, oily face of the Oasis proprietor. Nick Greco.

Nick's smile had no background. "Hello, snoop. Something wrong?"

The writer's gray eyes rested briefly on the man's dark gaze. "Judge Oliver was killed tonight."

Oddly, Nick seemed relieved. "I am not sorry."

"We wondered if Rose could help us," Spence continued. "She knew a thing or two about the Judge's dealings."

Suspicion raced into Nick's broad face. "Rose is all right. Rosie is going straight."

"Sure, but she might have a line on this."

Nick snorted, then said, "Follow me."

Rosie's dressing room was next to the kitchen entrance. The trio

paused at the door. From within came feminine voices, shrill and abusive.

Nick said, "My wife is jealous." He pushed open the door.

Rosie was seated before the dressing table. A thin, dark, intense woman in a scarlet gown stood stiffly beside her. Mrs. Greco. Both women turned.

Nick introduced them. His wife nodded coldly.

Rosie asked: "What's on your mind, Hawkshaw?"

Spence told her.

Rosie looked startled. Nick's wife sent her a sharp glance. Rosie asked finally: "Why bother me?"

"Why, indeed!" Mrs. Greco shrilled. "She was with Nick all afternoon. How could she take time out for murder?"

Nick said, "You're nuts."

His wife cringed, but she held her ground. "I'm waiting for her alibi."

"I wasn't accusing anyone," Spence said genially. "Rosie's only one of a hundred suspects."

Rosie whispered: "I hated him. Everyone who ever stood before him hated him. But I didn't kill him. And I don't know who did."

Nick's wife spat: "Then you can tell Mr. Wood where you were at the time of the murder."

There was silence for a moment. Rosie was ashen except for twin spots of rouge. Greco was impassive. Then a voice from the doorway said, "Rosie was with me all afternoon until we came up here."

It was the M.C., Clyde Cooper. His thin face was blank, his black eyes alight. "She was with me," he repeated, "at my apartment."

Nick's wife smiled cynically.

"It's true," Rosie admitted. "So what?"

There was a tension in the air. Too many high wire temperaments in the room; somebody should blow up. But Nick Greco was there — and Nick was a force both mental and physical. The silence seemed to hammer.

Hal's deep voice cut in. "Nice bracelet, Rose."

Rosie's eyes refused to drop to the rubies at her wrist. For the first time Nick seemed to lose poise. Cooper looked puzzled.

Nick's wife said accusingly. "My husband gave it to her."

Spence said lightly, "Hal likes rubies; they go with his hair. Well, I guess there's no point in sticking here —"

In the corridor, Hal gritted, "Five to one those rubies were hot. Everybody knows Nick's a fence."

"That doesn't concern us now, Hal." Spence paused. He said

guardedly, "Cooper was lying. And Nick's wife may be useful."

"That puts Rosie in the middle," Hal said. As he redeemed his dress cap from the hat check girl he turned on the charm. "Beautiful eyes like yours must notice a lot."

The eyes swept the soldier's handsome height. "Sometimes they like what they see."

Hal grinned. "You've got good taste, baby. But did you see Rosie Malone come in tonight?"

"She came in at nine — with Nick."

The yellow roadster was parked in a lot back of the club. Something white was on the leather seat. Spence bent to pick it up — and something swished over his head to clatter against the windshield. Hal whirled, but all was silence and darkness.

Spence whipped out a handkerchief, picked up the stiletto from the floorboards. Some of Nick's crowd were handy with knives . . .

"What does the note say?" Hal inquired.

"It's typed. Says: *Why don't you stick to fiction? The Oliver case might be your finish.*"

Hal took the note, put it to his nose. "Gardenia again."

THE FATIGUE-RIDDEN INSPECTOR GRANT TOOK THE NOTE and stiletto the next morning. "What do you make of it?" he asked wearily.

"The knife could be Nick's work. I'm not sure about the note. Anyways, Inspector, check the prints on the knife and get the dope on the type used for that note . . . Do you know anything new?"

"The judge's nephew, Tommy Oliver, is sole heir. There were no prints on the cigarette butts. It was a .22 revolver."

Hal said, "Tommy's a playboy, isn't he?"

"Just like his uncle," Grant agreed. "But the army'll take that out of him — soon. Our friend Hague was in this morning. He said the town is rotten with crime and implied that his office isn't at all pleased with the bureau."

"Hague's more powerful than any D.A. has a right to be," Spence affirmed. "He and the judge certainly railroaded Rosie Malone."

"Rosie! Rosie!" Hal sputtered. "Everything comes back to that curse of the race. Drag her in and beat it out of her."

Grant bit off the end of a cigar. "Why not drag them all in? Somebody should give."

"Do it," Spence advised. "And get a specimen of their handwriting."

Grant looked up sharply. "You didn't get any other notes — ?"

"His newest sweetheart, Inspector," Hal reminded. "Graphology,

the key to the mind."

"The hand," Spence explained, "can do only what the brain tells it to do. And the brain determines the personality."

He relaxed in a chair, picked up the morning paper. The front page featured the Allied Air Offensive. An editorial flayed the local police department. At the society page Spence paused. Tommy Oliver, he read, has definitely broken with his fiancee, Miss Alicia Butterworth. And all over a swingstress!

Everything, as Hal had said, came back to Rosie . . .

At the questioning Nick had nothing to say. If there were any charges, his lawyer would do the talking.

Nick's wife said: "Cooper lied. Nick was with Rose. Young Oliver's crazy about her, too. They're all gone on her."

Cooper told them: "All right — I lied. Because I knew she was with a married man and I knew it wouldn't help her record. I know she's going straight now."

"I was with Nick," Rosie admitted. "I won't say where. Send me up again if you want. I'm sick of the whole mess."

Tommy Oliver pretended no grief over his uncle's death. "I never liked him. I'm going to turn the inheritance over to the Red Cross before I leave for camp."

Inspector Grant obtained handwriting specimens from all five with little trouble.

When Hal returned from a bowling session with what was left of his old crowd, he found the novelist studying the results of the specimens. Nick's brutality was evident; the t bar was wedge shaped. Rosie's voluptuous scrawl . . . Cooper's reticent backhand; inhibited that lad. The immature copybook perfection of Nick's wife . . . Tommy Oliver's careless generosity . . .

The phone rang. It was Rosie.

"I couldn't talk at the Oasis. And Nick had me tailed all day. Will you go up to my apartment and wait there for me?"

"Right." Spence turned to Hal. "Rosie wants a tete-a-tete with me. I'm taking a cab — the coupe is too conspicuous for this job. You're welcome to use it."

"Thanks," the redhead replied. "First I'm going to raid the ice box and grab a little shuteye."

Spencer Wood was admitted to Rosie's apartment by the manager. He took a position behind a half closed bathroom door, commanding a view of the room. For an hour, two hours, Spence sat there in the gloom, trying to fit in his mind the disordered pieces of the jigsaw

puzzle. It was almost time for Rosie to appear at the Oasis. She should be here now.

The phone rang.

Spence hesitated about answering it, then groped through the darkened apartment toward the insistent clamor. He skinned his shins, cursed, located the phone finally.

He tried to imitate Rosie's voice. "Hello."

It was Hal.

"Never mind the falsetto, boss. Hague's been shot."

Spence said sharply, "Bring the car up here — fast!"

He was waiting at the curb when the yellow convertible sped up.

On the way over Hal told him: "The same setup. A veiled woman, the scent of gardenias and lipstick on the butts."

Hague was spread-eagled on the livingroom carpet. Spence took one glance at the thin face with the sensual mouth and averted his eyes.

"Did you check on Rosie?" he asked Grant.

The inspector looked grim. "She hadn't turned up at the club. Before Hague died he muttered something about 'never saw the girl before.'"

"That fits in with my hunch, even though it is far-fetched," Spence said. "Come on, soldier, we're going to the Oasis again."

Nick was talking to the hat check girl when they arrived. He asked: "Seen Rosie?"

"No." Spence said crisply. "We're here to find out where she is."

The burly man shrugged. "I'd like to know myself. I haven't seen her all day."

"You're lying, Nick. You've been having her followed."

Nick's face froze.

Hal stepped forward, his jaw menacing, his fists ready for action. "We can prove you're a fence, Nick, but you wouldn't burn for *that!* Sound your key and start singing — fast!"

Nick's eyes burned. "The boys lost her — out near the park."

"Maybe. Why were they tailing her?"

Nick's wife came up then. Her dark eyes were fearful. "What's happened to Rosie?"

Gardenia fragrance came with her. Hal nudged Spence and sniffed audibly.

Cooper, the emcee, walked in quietly, a question in his black eyes.

"I'm going to hunt for Rosie," Spence announced. "Come along, Hal?"

"I'm going with you," Cooper insisted, but Nick ordered him to stay. The show needed an emcee.

"That was a break," Spence admitted to Hal as they drove away. "Cooper wouldn't appreciate what we're about to do: search Rosie's apartment and maybe Cooper's, too."

The novelist's badge, a courtesy of Grant's, took him into both apartments, but the search proved fruitless.

"I'm going home to bed," Spence said wearily.

But Spence didn't go to bed immediately. For an hour he pored over the handwriting specimens. The next morning was spent in a survey of the east side dress shops. By noon he was back at his own apartment, from which he called Grant.

"I'm still in a blackout on this case," the inspector admitted. "Maybe Rosie did kill Hague and Oliver and this disappearance is really her getaway."

"Perhaps. If I learn anything I'll give you a buzz, Inspector."

Spence had barely replaced the receiver when the phone rang. A muffled feminine voice said, "This is Rosie Malone."

Spence listened quietly. She was, Rosie explained, in hiding. She had nothing to do with the Oliver case. But she knew the murderer. And if he, Spence, promised her immunity on the jewel theft, she'd reveal the killer's identity.

"I haven't the authority for that," Spence said earnestly. "But I'll promise not to turn you in, if you give me a lead on the murderer?"

"You'll come alone? Word of honor, no tipoff?"

"No tipoff," Spence promised, his gray eyes alight with expectation. Swiftly he copied down the directions.

For a minute he studied them. The isolated spot she mentioned was about twelve miles out of town. The sensible thing would be to take a few of Grant's men along. But, if the tip were correct, Rosie might prove stubborn. Besides, he'd promised.

His heavy .45 tucked snugly in its shoulder holster, Spence hurried out. Within twenty minutes he was turning into the rutted drive leading to the cabin. As the coupe jounced over the rough path between the pines, he wondered if he weren't being foolhardy. But the feel of his gun reassured him.

IT WAS A SINGLE ROOM CABIN with a fieldstone chimney at one end. No windows were visible from the front. A heavy door opened onto the ramshackle front porch.

Spence snapped off the ignition and waited for a few minutes. He'd like it better if Rosie came out here to talk. Nothing stirred. Finally he left his car, crossed the porch and approached the door warily. It was ajar. He pushed it open the rest of the way.

The cabin was empty.

Then, as his glance swept the window-less room, the door closed behind him. And, in a corner cupboard, he heard a distinct splash.

Spence whirled. The door was locked, bolted from the outside!

His eyes traced a wire leading from a door jamb switch to the corner cupboard. Swiftly he strode over, ripped the thing open.

Three dresses, two evening cloaks, a miscellaneous assortment of feminine clothes met his searching eyes. The puzzle was complete.

Then his eyes dropped. And his heart stopped. A crock of liquid was on the cupboard floor. Above it was a tipped shelf, actuated by the mechanism the door had operated.

Spence peeled off his coat, blanketed the jar. Eggs of cyanide had been on that shelf. Of that he was sure. They had been tipped into the crock of sulphuric acid. It was a crude but effective lethal gas machine.

His heart hammered, his eyes raced over the room's interior. He was sure of the murderer's identity now. But that knowledge would die with him, unless —

He strode to the fireplace, stooped to peer up the rough chimney. It was dark, blocked. How well, he could not see.

His .45 was out, pointed straight at the opening. Its roar reverberated in the small room.

But there was no ricochet. The chimney was probably stuffed with paper, rags. He'd find out. It was his only chance. If the chimney proved too narrow — well, he would die trying.

Cautiously, he crept into the fireplace, straightened. His shoulders crammed into the narrow space, his extended hands sought grippage. Slowly, he lifted himself up.

For two feet he ascended without undue difficulty. Then, in the grimy blackness, his shoulder collided with a jutting stone. Viciously, he twisted, tried to squirm past. Soot clogged his nostrils, choked him. He sneezed, and a shower of dust stung his eyes.

He relaxed a moment, fought for a steady breath, tried to still the wild hammering of his heart. The exertion? Or was the deadly gas beginning its work? It was odorless, he knew. And fast.

Again he squirmed upward. And this time managed to squeeze past. Another foot upward he wormed painfully.

Then his groping fingers came in contact with some material wadded in the space above. He paused, exploring with his outstretched fingers.

Cloth. He jerked savagely downward — but the gritty material did not budge.

He was straining for a fresh grip, when a voice from below said quietly: "I'd suggest you come down, Mr. Wood. Or prepare to die where you are."

Spence went rigid. His pounding heart seemed to echo in the deadly quiet. He said hoarsely: "Come down to a gas-filled room? I'll die here. Shoot and be damned!"

The quiet voice remained toneless. "The door is open, your coat stifling most of the gas. Drop your gun and come down."

Spence had a sudden intuition. If the person below were armed, Spencer Wood would be a dead man by now. It was just a ruse to get his gun.

"I'm staying here," he grated. He pulled his automatic from its holster..

"As you wish," the voice continued. "It will take you some time to reach the roof — if you do. I'll just move this crock into the fireplace — "

Spence said quietly: "I'll come down."

"Your gun first — "

The automatic clattered to the bricks below.

Spence followed it a moment later.

Standing some distance from the fireplace, holding Spencer Wood's gun, was a slim form in feminine black serge and gas mask.

Spence's eyes met the goggled murderer's. "Mr. Cooper, I believe, despite the dress?" The casualness of his voice was foreign to the glint in his gray eyes.

"Remarkable, Mr. Wood. And — before you die — how did you guess?"

"Obvious," Spence snorted. "Overdone. The carelessly left cigarette stubs, the too-strong perfume, obviously plants." He fought the dizziness which threatened to overwhelm him. "You were probably a female impersonator at one time."

The man nodded. "One of the best — but not appreciated."

Spence said: "Your handwriting showed the feminine touch, and a viciousness — and imagination, I must admit. These were the character traits of the murderer." He coughed. "Could I get a little closer to the door? I'm unarmed. And I'd like to hear your story before I die."

The man nodded coolly, kept the gun trained on him as Spence moved nearer the open door.

Then the novelist turned. "It was because of Rosie. You love her?"

"I did. I loved her enough to kill the men who framed her. And then

she threatened to expose me in order to get out of a jewel-theft rap. She was with Nick that afternoon, looking over some hot stuff."

Spence asked: "You made her call me?"

Cooper's muffled voice rose proudly: "I did the talking. Pretty good imitation, I take it."

"Where's Rosie?"

"I sent her to join Hague and Oliver."

Spence smiled. A hard smile. Nausea blended with hate in his heart. "Sending you to the chair will be a pleasure, Mr. Cooper."

The gun lifted. Black eyes burned insanely behind the goggles. The thin hand clenched, the trigger finger jerked . . .

A big, uniformed figure charged through the open doorway. Hal smashed at the killer in a flying tackle. Cooper went down, his head striking the stone fireplace.

"Nice going," Spence said. "In another second — " He shook his head and took a deep breath. "But how did you find me?"

The redhead grinned. "You left the directions on the phone stand. I borrowed a car and followed. Just in time, too!"

"Just in time," Spence agreed solemnly.

It wasn't until he was alone that Spencer Wood replaced the bullets he had removed from his .45 while up in the chimney. ☐

MYSTERY MAKERS Continued from page 97

We've got a brother/brother act in this issue. PAUL GLEESON, alleged 38-year-old Chicago lawyer and writer, whose UNHAPPY HOUR regaled you in the May MSMM, has another story, DON'T TOUCH THAT DIAL in this issue. His brother, TONY GLEESON, is our cover artist. Tony tells us:

In previous existences (before Southern California), I have been a musician, a liquor salesman, a sign painter, a graphic designer, an art forger, and a burden on my friends. Presently I am a painter and illustrator and reside in L.A. with the only two people who could put up with me: my fantastic wife Annie and our terrific little boy, Matthew. Rumor has it that I'm thirty-one. My goals in life are to retain my sanity and to survive long enough to live off my children.

Continued on page 122

《1932》

Rape? In a little Texas town in the thirties? Impossible. Besides, what boy would have to force the town slut to do anything he wanted her to do!

Sweet Alice

by CLAYTON MATTHEWS

WE NEVER HAD ANY SEX CRIMES in our little East Texas town back in the Thirties. A sex maniac among us would have been as alien as a visitor from Mars. Oh, there was likely some adultery taking place. Probably now and then a little unusual male force was exercised in the back seat of a Model A. But neither of these things was considered a sex crime.

For that reason, there was more laughter than outrage when Ada May Johnson came running to Sheriff Jason Little, claiming that Melvin Burns had assaulted her.

And when Sheriff Jason talked of arresting Melvin, there was mixed indignation and jeering.

“Assault? Arrest Melvin Burns for assault?”

“Heckfire, Jason, you know that Ada May’s reputation! She’s been with just about ever old boy in town.”

“You’d only look foolish, Jason Little! No jury’d ever convict him.”

This last came from Aunt Beth, Sheriff Jason’s sister. They were sitting on the front porch after supper discussing it. Aunt Beth had wanted to send me off to bed, but Sheriff Jason had said firmly, “No,

Kylie's old enough. High time he learned a few things."

"About Ada May Johnson, you mean?"

"Now you know that's not what I meant, Sis!"

They weren't related to me, the Littles. They had taken me in to raise after my mother's death. And Sheriff Jason wasn't really a sheriff, just a deputy, the only law in our little town. The sheriff was over at the county seat.

"All I know," Aunt Beth said, "is that Ada May Johnson is the town tramp."

Sheriff Jason sighed. "I thought maybe, being a woman, you'd take her side a little."

"If she was a decent girl, like Alice Graham, say, I would."

Alice Graham was our school beauty, a blond blue-eyed girl with such a fragile beauty and look of innocence that I always thought of Alice in Wonderland whenever I saw her. I was secretly in love with her, but I doubted she'd ever taken any particular notice of me.

Sheriff Jason was saying, "Doesn't seem to me that what she is or ain't matters. The point is she says she was forced, that Melvin hit her several times . . ."

"The point is, who can believe her?"

Sheriff Jason sucked on his cold pipe. "She has a black eye, a cut lip, and some bruises."

"She could have got all that some other way."

"She could, but somehow I believe her. Of course, the whole thing is that Melvin Burns is the local hero, the boy who made two touchdowns in our final game last fall, giving the high school football team an unbeaten season, the first time ever."

"And he's handsome, polite, a well-behaved boy. He could have any girl he wanted . . ." Aunt Beth broke off, slanting a sharp look at me. After a moment she said, "Have you talked to Melvin? What does he say?"

"Denies it, of course."

"There you are!" she said triumphantly. "It's his word against Ada May's. So who's going to believe her over him?"

He sighed. "That's about it, Sis, in a nutshell. Most people don't seem willing to."

"And I'll say again, you'd look a fool, Jason Little, arresting him. It ain't as thought her folks'll care enough to press it. They're no better than she is."

"I just don't know. I can't make up my mind. The thing that worries me . . . suppose what she says is true and he does it again, to some other girl?"

"Melvin Burns? Pshaw! I don't believe it for a minute!"

They fell silent then, and after a little I slipped off to bed. I was troubled and lay awake for a long time. It was unlike Sheriff Jason not to be able to make up his mind about something. But there was something more that was bothering me.

I was a senior in high school that year, as was Melvin, but I still didn't know him too well. I wasn't on the football team, and naturally most of his friends were from the squad. But I'd overheard some of their talk.

Their talk was pretty raw. Aunt Beth would have been surprised, and doubtless shocked, if she knew how much I'd picked up about the forbidden subject, never mind that in later years I learned that a lot of it was misinformation.

The older boys were always bragging about their conquests, Melvin Burns as much as the others. Nobody, much less me, had ever thought to doubt him. He was everything Aunt Beth said he was — handsome, clean-cut, popular, *and* the school's football hero.

But now I was puzzled. Why, if all he said about girls was true, had he fooled around with Ada May, forcing her or not?

It could be that I was a little envious. I was still a virgin, even at seventeen. Those days were different; it wasn't unusual for a boy, or a girl, to reach twenty or more and still be virgin.

SHERIFF JASON DIDN'T HAVE AN OFFICE. But almost every afternoon he would be at the Texaco filling station at the corner on the road leading out of town, sitting on an upended Nehi box, smoking his pipe, several men hunkered down around him.

"Sort of like holding court, Kyle," he told me once with that twinkle in his eye. "I guess I do more lawing, settle more disputes, at that filling station than anywhere else."

The next afternoon he was there as usual when I came by on my way home from school, a half dozen men collected around him. I squatted down close enough so I could listen, yet not be in the way.

They were still chewing over the problem of Melvin Burns and Ada May Johnson.

"Girls like that shouldn't be allowed to dirty the good name of such as Melvin Burns. Should have been run out of town long since, her and her whole family."

"If what she says is true, she's the injured party," Sheriff Jason said mildly.

"She's a no-good, everybody knows it," a man named Ben Logan said.

"What she is don't matter, she's still got rights. Every town has an Ada May or two. Back when we were all Kyle's age yonder, there was Bessie Rollins." Sheriff Jason's eyes had that twinkle. "Recollect that little old girl, Ben? If I remember rightly, you snuck around Bessie a time or two."

Ben's face turned a beet red as the others laughed at him. "You, too, Jason Little."

"Ain't denying that, Ben. That's my point. But none of us attacked her."

"Didn't have to."

"So why did Melvin have to? According to everybody, Ada May Johnson is no different from Bessie Rollins."

Abruptly Sheriff Jason heaved himself to his feet. "Come along, Kyle, let's get along home."

We lived a distance out beyond the city limits. We walked along in silence for a while, Sheriff Jason smoking moodily.

Finally I said, "What are you going to do, Sheriff Jason? You going to arrest Melvin?"

"Reckon I'm going to have to, to live with myself. He did an awful thing to that girl. Maybe they won't convict him, like everybody says. Even if they do, they won't do much to him, since he's underage. But maybe he'll think twice about doing it again." His hand descended on my shoulder, squeezing slightly. "Listen to me, boy. You're about old enough now. I ain't going to tell you not to mess around with the likes of Ada May. Rather you didn't, but that's going to be up to you. But at least treat'em like human beings, not like dirt under your feet." He fell to musing now. "In some ways women have the best of it over us men. But I'm afraid not when it comes down to things like this. Man can do just about anything he pleases. Women do the same thing, she's a tramp. Pray God, some day things will be different."

THE NEXT MORNING SHERIFF JASON TOOK MELVIN BURNS over to the county seat and charged him with rape and assault upon the person of Ada May Johnson. The trial date was set for early the following week.

On Monday after school, the day before the trial, an amazing thing happened to me. I had started up the block after school let out when I heard running footsteps behind me.

"Wait up, Kyle."

I stopped, turning, and felt my mouth fall open. To the best of my recollection, Alice Graham had *never* spoken to me.

Clutching her books to her bosom, she stopped before me. "Kyle . . . Walk me home?"

That peach complexion took on additional color under my awed gaze. I closed my mouth and said hastily, "Sure. Glad to, Alice."

She lived in the west part of town, and Sheriff Jason's place was to the south. But what did that matter to me? I'd detour miles out of my way to walk the prettiest girl in school home.

"Here, let me carry your books."

Naturally I dropped one in the exchange, but she was nice enough not to laugh when I stooped to pick it up.

We walked along, talking of school and other inconsequential matters. I strode beside her, my first flush of jubilation passing. Why had she asked me to walk her home? I very much doubted it was just for the pleasure of *my* company.

We were more than halfway to her house before she got around to it, saying abruptly, "Kyle, does Sheriff Jason really think Melvin did that awful thing to Ada May?"

"Certainly he does," I said somewhat stiffly. "Sheriff Jason ain't the kind of man to do something unless he believes he's in the right."

She sighed, walking in silence for a moment. "I just find it hard to believe about Melvin. He seems such a nice boy."

I could think of no comment to make, so I said nothing.

"He asked me to the Graduation Dance, you know, asked me long before all this happened. I was happy to accept. Melvin Burns, and me not even a senior! My folks gave their permission. You know how well thought of Melvin is. But now . . ." She sighed again. "Mom's all upset. So I had to tell Melvin that I couldn't go with him."

We were in sight of her house now, and I was slowly coming to a boil. It seemed all everybody had talked about for weeks was Melvin Burns, and now to hear all this from Alice . . .

"Is that why you wanted me to walk you home, to talk about Melvin?"

She flashed me a startled look. "Why . . . Not exactly, Kyle."

"Sure sounds like it to me."

"You know, I've always liked you, Kyle." She tried a tentative smile.

"How would I know that? Today's the first time you've ever spoken to me."

"It is? Why, I was sure that I . . ."

"Seems to me you should wait until the trial's over. Then you'll

know whether Melvin's guilty or not. Now, here's your house, and here's your books."

I dumped the books into her arms and started off.

"Wait, Kyle! I'm sorry. Please wait!"

I halted, turning back.

She was smiling softly. "That's not the reason I asked you to walk me home, Kyle, really it's not. Kyle . . . Would *you* take me to the Graduation Dance?"

"Me?" My voice was a croak. "You want *me* to take you?"

"Would you? Please?"

Those blue eyes were staring directly into mine, and I lost myself in them. It was unheard of for a girl to ask a boy to the dance. And by Sweet Alice Graham no less!

Of course I said I would, sputtering the words out, never mind that I couldn't dance a lick. I ran all the way home. I'd heard Aunt Beth brag on how good a dancer she had been in her younger days.

She was going to have to teach me, with less than a month to go.

I WASN'T ALLOWED TO ATTEND THE TRIAL, but I heard all about it soon enough.

Melvin's Pa hired a fancy lawyer from Fort Worth. He put several boys on the stand who admitted to being intimate with Ada May. Then he really tore into Ada May when it came her turn to testify, making her out to be the town slut. When he was done, she fled the courtroom in tears. She and her family left our town about two weeks later and were never heard from again.

And Melvin? The jury was only out fifteen minutes before finding him not guilty.

"I'm surprised they even took that long," said Ben Logan down at the gas station. "So how do you feel now, Jason Little?"

Sheriff Jason said somberly, "I did what I felt I had to do."

"Didn't have to do nothing of the sort! Dragging that poor boy through all that. And for what? Shaming him in front of the whole county!"

I could have told them differently, but I knew better than to speak up. If Melvin felt any shame, he hadn't shown it that day in school. Oh, he didn't brag on getting off like that, didn't strut like a rooster, as I suppose most boys in his fix would have.

During the noon hour, the other boys gathered around, clapping him on the shoulder.

"Way to go, Melvin!"

"Boy, did that lawyer show Ada May up for what she is. Bet she

won't be doing that to some old boy again!"

"That Sheriff Jason should be fired for arresting you."

Melvin took it all modestly enough. "I'm happy for the way it turned out, of course. But I feel kinda sorry for Ada May." He caught sight of me on the edge of the crowd and came toward me. "You tell Sheriff Jason I don't hold no grudge, Kyle. He did his duty as he saw fit." Reaching me, he lowered his voice. "Alice tells me you're taking her to the Graduation Dance."

"That's right." I watched him warily. He was smiling.

"Reckon I can't blame her much." He slapped me on the shoulder. "Now you be good to her, hear? Alice is a good old girl."

Walking home with Sheriff Jason that afternoon, I told him what Melvin had said about him.

"Said that, did he? Right nice of the boy, I must say," he said in a dry voice.

THE WEEK BEFORE THE GRADUATION DANCE, I wavered about going. All of Aunt Beth's efforts to teach me to dance had come to little. I was still as heavy-footed as a plowhorse. I was sure that if I backed out, Melvin Burns would be happy to take Alice. Even if he already had a date, he'd break it. Who wouldn't, to take Alice Graham?

But in the end I went. Alice was the reason, of course. Since that first time, I'd walked her home at least twice a week, and was, as the smaller kids taunted me, ". . . stuck on Sweet Alice!" Not once during those walks had Melvin's name entered into the conversation. I simply could not pass up the opportunity to take her to the dance.

It was held in the high school gym on Graduation Day. I had graduated with respectable grades, but Melvin Burns was valedictorian of the graduating class. That afternoon, clean-cut and handsome in a new suit, he'd delivered a stirring valedictory address.

I didn't have a new suit. But that wasn't unusual; few of us did, in those Depression times. I wore a new pair of pants and shoes Sheriff Jason had bought me for the occasion, a white shirt starched board-stiff by Aunt Beth, and my school sweater, with the letter I'd earned in track that spring. Melvin could play football, but I could run and jump a little, well enough to win the hundred yard dash and the high hurdles at our annual track meet.

The kids weren't chaperoned, but Sheriff Jason was going to be there, just in case there was any trouble. He knew that some of the boys would show up with a bottle of hooch. He drove the Model A to the schoolhouse, then let me take it to pick up Alice.

I had only recently learned to drive, and I took it slow and easy, especially on the way back to the schoolhouse with Alice. She had on a long party dress, pink in color, nicely complementing her blond hair. She was very pretty. I felt tacky alongside her, and wished I had a new suit.

In the car she squeezed my arm and said, "You look very nice, Kyle."

"You look . . ." I swallowed, then blurted, "You're beautiful, Alice!"

"Why, thank you, Kyle. You're sweet." She squeezed my arm again, and said softly, "I'm glad it's you taking me to the dance."

She hadn't been quite ready, and I'd had to wait awhile. As a consequence the gym was already packed when we arrived. The high school band was playing a jumpy tune with more enthusiasm than skill.

The dance floor was pretty crowded. I was happy for that. Maybe she wouldn't notice what a lousy dancer I was. But that hope was foredoomed.

I stepped on her feet twice before the end of the number, and I was so tense and nervous that sweat was rolling off me. I was afraid she could smell my body odor.

When the number ended, I stood back a safe distance, saying miserably, "I'm sorry, Alice. I know I'm a terrible dancer. Aunt Beth has been trying to teach me, but I'm a hopeless case, I guess."

"Not hopeless, Kyle. You just need practice. Maybe this summer you'd like to come over to my house? We could play the phonograph and I'll teach you how to dance. Anybody can learn with practice."

I had been sure she wouldn't want to see me again once school was out. I could have shouted with joy.

Instead, as the band started up again, I led her onto the dance floor, holding her a little closer this time. We had only taken a few steps, when I felt a tap on my shoulder.

It was Melvin Burns, all decked out in his new suit. "Mind if I cut in, Kyle? Can't keep Sweet Alice to yourself all night. That's downright selfish."

I looked at Alice. She gave a helpless little shrug. I released her, stepping back. As Melvin moved past me to take her into his arms, I caught the strong odor of whiskey on his breath.

Naturally he danced well, as he did everything else. In a way it was a relief to get off the dance floor, yet I hated to turn Alice over to Melvin.

I edged around the dancers to where two bowls of non-alcoholic punch were setting on a table. Big chunks of ice floated in them. I

poured a glass of punch. It tasted terrible, but at least it was cooling. I looked around for Melvin and Alice; the mob of dancers was too thick for me to see them.

"Lost your girl already, Kyle?" Sheriff Jason asked at my elbow.

"Melvin Burns cut in," I said. I added defensively, "It would have been rude to refuse."

He nodded, his glance on the dance floor. "It would have, I reckon." He hesitated, then said slowly, "But turn about's fair play. Next dance, you cut in on him. She is your girl, Kyle. For tonight, anyway." He walked off.

I wanted to finish the punch first. By that time another dance had started. I went looking for them. I couldn't find them. I asked a few boys I knew. None knew where they were.

I wasn't too worried at first. It was a warm night. Gymnasiums in those days weren't air-conditioned, and others were looking hot, too, collars wilted, shirts stained with sweat. Melvin and Alice could have stepped outside for a breath of air, and a few words. I hated to go prowling around in the dark outside, like some jealous kid.

But fifteen minutes later, when the band decided to take a break, I was really beginning to worry. I had decided to go look for them; others were wandering outside now. I was heading for the wide front doors when a boy I recognized as one of Melvin's buddies burst through the doors. He was wild-eyed, his clothes dirty and torn. He spotted Sheriff Jason leaning against the wall, talking to one of the teachers. He rushed toward them.

Heart beginning to race, I broke into a run, and reached them in time to hear the boy say breathlessly, "You'd better come, Sheriff Jason! Something terrible's happened!"

Sheriff Jason came off the wall fast. I was right on his heels.

Outside, the boy gestured toward the children's merry-go-round. It was dark over there, and I couldn't see the men and boys clustered around something on the ground until we were almost there. Just as we reached them, I saw something else.

Off to one side, two large boys were holding Melvin Burns by both arms. His jacket was off, and his white shirt was torn. There were several long, dark marks on his face, like scratches. He was standing perfectly still, and it was so dark that I couldn't see his eyes, but I got the impression they were closed.

I turned back to the group, which was parting now to let Sheriff Jason through. The boy who had come to fetch him was talking in a high, jerky voice, "... heard this scream, but we didn't think anything of it . . . music stopped inside . . . heard a choking noise, scuff-

ling sounds, and a couple of us came over to see what . . . ”

The group had parted now, and I could see what was on the ground. I stopped in my tracks, mind frozen. Alice Graham, head twisted at an odd angle, lay on her back on the gravel. Her legs were wide apart, one knee flung out, and that beautiful pink dress was rucked up around her waist.

Sheriff Jason dropped to one knee beside her. First, he gently pulled the dress down to hide her nakedness. Then he touched her on the cheek, and her head rolled around so that I could see her face.

Dear God, her face! I will never forget it.

Her tongue protruded, swollen and black, an obscenity.

Through a blur I saw Sheriff Jason get to his feet, and I realized that I was crying. I made some kind of an animal sound in my throat, and whirled toward where they were holding Melvin.

I had only taken two quick steps toward him before Sheriff Jason had me by the arm. “No, Kyle,” he said gently. “You don’t want to do that. Hitting him would help nothing, boy. He won’t get off so easy this time. That, I promise you!”

I choked back a sob. “A doctor . . . Somebody should call a doctor for Alice.”

“It’s too late for that, Kyle. She’s gone. I reckon she tried to fight him, and he strangled the life right out of her.”

MYSTERY MAKERS Continued from page 112

WILLIAM F. NOLAN (*Pulp Pioneer of the Private Eye*) is probably better known as creator of the Logan science fiction series (*Logan’s Run*, et al) but the field of biography is well-represented by titles under his byline. He’s done books on racer Barney Oldfield and actor Steve McQueen, among others, and has recently completed 100,000 words on Dashiell Hammett, a mystery writer of some note. His article for this special theme issue is on Carroll John Daly, who, Nolan says, “was a wonderfully-awful pulp hack whose stuff is so bad it’s good.”



1949

*"They were going to kill me, Carl!" Martha whined.
"They broke in and hit me and kicked me. One man
had a knife, and he was going to kill me!"*

Don't Touch That Dial!

by PAUL GLEESON

CHESTER RILEY WAS TRYING TO SNEAK IN THE BACK DOOR without waking his wife Peg. He stepped on the cat, which meowed. The radio audience laughed. They knew Peg was waiting up for Riley, and that she'd really give it to him when he got inside. Everyone knew but poor Riley.

In the living room of the Donner home, Martha Donner sat quietly, her figure dimly lit by the yellow dial light from the Philco console. The volume was turned up loud, and when the inevitable confrontation came, with Riley protesting his innocence and Peg yelling, "Chester A. Riley, how could you?" the howls of the audience filled the room.

Martha didn't laugh. The only motion she made was with her hands, kneading, lacing fingers, unlacing, kneading again.

She was waiting up for her husband Carl. There was nothing funny about a man staying out late, she thought, while his wife sat home with only the radio for company. Carl wouldn't buy a television set. They weren't perfected yet, he said. And night after night, Carl was out. With "the boys," he said. But she knew it wasn't just "the boys" he was with. Lipstick stains on his collars, faint odors of cologne . . . oh,

she knew all right.

Tonight she was waiting up for him, like Peg for Chester, she thought. But Carl's surprise was going to be much different from Riley's.

The music swelled and a Pabst commercial came on. After the commercial, the Rileys made up and Chester vowed never to stay out late again. "My head is made up," he said. The audience laughed and applauded. Martha's hands twitched in her lap.

Carl never apologized. He got huffy whenever she complained about his neglecting her. He claimed she was nagging him. He no longer cared for her, she knew. Maybe he even hated her. She didn't care. She hated Carl, too.

Outside, the purple of evening darkened to blackness. The street light three doors down came on, casting faint, eerie shadows into the curtained living room. Martha made no move to turn on the floor lamp. The Philco dial's soft, golden glow was her only light.

Dragnet followed Riley. Martha usually didn't like the serious shows, but she let the program play its course while she sat in the chair, rigid and unmoving.

A car turned onto the street outside. As it rounded the corner, its headlights stabbed momentarily through the gossamer curtains into the Donner living room. A reflection of bright metal glinted briefly from Martha's lap. Then the car was gone.

The heavy, sonorous clang of steel against steel signalled the end of *Dragnet* and the march-like cadences of the theme song filled the living room to the point of distraction. Martha remained still.

Hammering, she thought bitterly. That's what he's been doing to me. Hammering me with his selfishness, his moodiness, his other women. Her cooking was no good, she was too fat, she had no sense of humor . . . nothing she did was right in his eyes. Her hands moved again, and the yellow dial light caught the metallic gleam from the object in her lap for just a moment.

Truth or Consequences came on next. To the obvious relish of the noisy studio audience, Ralph Edwards solemnly advised the first hapless contestant — who hadn't even been given a chance to answer his question — that because he hadn't told the truth, he had to pay the consequences. "Ooooh," Edwards crooned to the wound-up audience as the man was led off-stage, "what's gonna happen to him! Aren't we devils?" Martha sighed deep in her chest. She made no other move.

She'd been bearing the consequences of her marriage to Carl for too long, she thought. "Devil" was the right word for him, too. He'd

inflicted the tortures of the damned on her, as she never tired of telling her mother, her friends, and virtually anyone else who'd listen. And tonight, when she had a very special reason for awaiting his return home in the darkened room, he'd probably stay out until all hours. What was it they said? "He'll be late for his own funeral."

But she could wait for him. This night, of all nights, she could certainly wait for him. Her hands moved nervously on her lap.

Truth or Consequences finally ended. Lowell Thomas was half-way through his ten o'clock news report when shuffling steps mounted the porch and a key noisily opened the lock after several vain attempts. Martha's wait was over. She sat straighter in her chair, her eyes glued to the dim outline of the living room door.

Carl Donner walked into the living room and turned on the floor lamp. He looked over at the chair and gasped.

"Martha, what the hell . . . ?"

The light from the three-way bulb shone brightly on Martha Donner. Her legs were bound tightly to the chair legs with lengths of rope and her chest was strapped to the upright chair back with knotted men's ties. Her mouth was gagged with ripped sheets and her hands were manacled together in her lap with heavy-duty steel handcuffs. Martha's face was livid with ugly welts and bruises. Her eyes were puffy and red from crying.

Carl rushed to her side and hurriedly undid the gag. "Martha, for God's sake, what happened?" he yelled above the blaring Philco.

"Carl . . . oh Carl . . . oh thank God you're home. I thought you'd never come. Where were you? Why did you stay out so late? I thought, I thought . . . oh God, Carl, it was awful. They . . ." Martha's voice broke, and she burst into tears.

"Calm down, dear," Carl said, his voice thick with beer. "It's all right, I'm home now. I'll get you some water and we'll call the police." He went into the kitchen. Martha tried to compose herself, sucking in deep draughts of air between racking sobs.

When she could speak again, she shouted out to the kitchen, her words coming in torrents. "They came in just after you left. They just broke right in and hit me and kicked me and . . . oh Carl, they hurt me. Why did you have to go out? And you stayed so long and . . ." She began crying again, reliving the horror of the last few hours.

The sound of running water came from the kitchen.

"They were going to *kill* me, Carl! The one man had a knife and he was going to . . . going to *kill* me! The other one stopped him. He . . . he said they shouldn't do it. They took the silverware and the

money and . . . oh Carl, it was horrible. If only you hadn't gone out tonight. You're always going out and leaving me alone!"

Carl shouted from the kitchen. "Were they wearing gloves, Martha?" His words had lost their boozy slur.

She frowned. "Gloves?" she shouted back. "I don't know. I don't think . . . no, no, they weren't wearing gloves."

"That's good," he replied loudly. "They probably left fingerprints all over the place."

The Philco boomed the somnolent network chimes, and an announcer gave the local station call letters. The water stopped running in the kitchen. A drawer opened and closed.

"Carl!" she yelled. "Can you hear me? Never mind the water or the fingerprints. Untie me! Carl? Carl?" She twisted vainly against her tight constraints.

She heard Carl coming back into the living room behind her. He was muttering to himself as he approached her chair.

Martha was turning to look at him when the butcher knife arched over her from behind and plunged deep into her chest the first time. She didn't feel the second and third blows. She slumped forward in death, pulling the knotted ties taut against the chair.

Breathing heavily, Carl dropped the knife on the carpet next to the chair. He switched off the floor lamp, removed his gardening gloves and dropped them on the floor. He looked at his watch.

He'd been gone from the tavern less than fifteen minutes. He had time to get back and rejoin his gang of drunken friends without being missed, the state they'd been in when he left. The two blundering punks would be blamed for this in spite of their gutlessness, he thought, and whether they were caught or not, he was in the clear. There was nothing to connect him with them, whoever they were. And they'd meant to kill her anyway, hadn't they?

The deep, rich voice of the next program's narrator poured through the house as Carl walked to the kitchen door. Before he stepped into the yard leading to the back alley, he paused to listen to the haunting zither music and the mellifluous tones of Orson Welles, laying the scene for this week's adventure of Harry Lime.

Carl smiled and hummed along with the zither as he closed the door behind him. That's what he was tonight, all right: the Third Man. But only he and Martha would ever know.

He quickened his pace down the alley. If he hurried, he wouldn't miss too much of the wrestling on the bar's television set. In fact, he thought, he might even get a set of his own.

He'd be spending a lot more time at home from now on.

STIFF COMPETITION

Book Reviews

by JOHN BALL

MURDER IN OTHER TIMES

IN ANCIENT TIMES: *Aristotle, Detective* by Margaret Doody. Athens in the days of Greece's glory is the setting for this story of murder by bow and arrow. When young Stephanos is involved in the killing of a prominent man and an innocent person is accused, he turns to his friend Aristotle for help and advice. The famed sage proves to be an effective detective as he orchestrates the investigation and helps to bring the guilty party to justice. As a straight mystery the story is a little weak, but the clues are fair and the logic holds up. Professor Doody knows her ancient Greece very well indeed and she is the first, to the best of our knowledge, to use it so effectively for a detective story. The trial scene is the high point of the book and here the author unfurls her best. Both interesting and unique. (Harper and Row, \$10.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

IN MEDIEVAL TIMES: *One Corpse Too Many* by Ellis Peters. It is a joy to report that Brother Cadfael, who debuted so brilliantly in *A Morbid Taste For Bones* is back with us again in his herb garden,

where he produces remedies including the very popular poppy syrup. This time he is caught up in a civil war between the cousins Maud and Stephen, who both claim the throne. The dazzling plot of *Bones* is not duplicated here — that would be asking too much — but the medieval setting works splendidly when 94 defenders of a siege town are hanged by Stephen, and Brother Cadfael discovers that there are 95 bodies. This is more an adventure novel than a detective story, although murder is done and once more the good Brother is the detective. A very good book somewhat overshadowed by its superb predecessor. (Morrow, \$8.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

IN VICTORIAN TIMES: *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Holmes* by John H. Watson M.D. (edited by Loren D. Estleman). This is in essence a reversed story. Sherlock Holmes is engaged to investigate the strange goings on between the respected Dr. Jekyll and his unsavory friend Mr. Hyde. Every reader will know the answer to the puzzle before the book begins, but it is good fun watching the sage of Baker Street confront a situation he understandably cannot believe. The premise here is that the events actually took place and that Robert Lewis Stevenson, who makes a brief appearance, wrote it up as fiction since the truth would never be accepted. An obvious pastiche which bears out Dr. Watson's authentic statement, "I hear of Sherlock Holmes everywhere." (Doubleday, \$8.95).

☆ ☆ ☆

IN COLONIAL TIMES: *Murder at the Hellfire Club* by Donald Zochert. In London Dr. Benjamin Franklin is called upon to solve a series of baffling murders associated with a notorious club of well-to-do rakes who carouse with women, wine, and song in that order. Several recent books present historical personages as detectives, none better equipped for the role than Franklin. A notable virtue of the present work is a locked-room problem that would have delighted John Dickson Carr. Furthermore, the solution is completely valid. However, it must be noted that Franklin's explanation of the final murder, and of a dying message, are somewhat less convincing. Carping aside, Franklin is the ideal choice for the detective here, and the famed early American genius lives up to his great reputation. (Penguin paperback, \$2.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

IN MODERN TIMES: *Felony File* by Dell Shannon. This is a well-written police procedural, the thirty-first from the author dealing with Lt. Luis Mendoza of the Los Angeles Police Department. The story moves at a brisk pace and holds interest, but after so many titles it is certainly time for this gifted lady to get her facts right. There are

no precincts in the Los Angeles Police Department (page 84). Also, there are no hearing or court rooms in the Hall of Justice (page 83), the name notwithstanding; it's the headquarters of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. Entertaining reading, but technically far short of what a police procedural should be. (Morrow, \$9.95)

★ ★ ★

The Grail Tree by Jonathan Gash. Lovejoy, the antique dealer, is back — which is a cause of rejoicing. Antiques are not our bag, but Lovejoy will fascinate you anyway. He is a complete scoundrel, yet trustworthy under some conditions, and a facile detective. In this, his third appearance, the story telling is breezy, but there are so many people it is hard to keep them straight; when the killer was unmasked we had to check back to be sure who he/she was. This time Lovejoy is on the track of the greatest and most important antique of all, The Holy Grail. Rest assured that this sacred object is in no way defiled by the text, but there is lots and lots about antiques that author Jonathan Gash (a pseudonym) contrives to make highly interesting. Lovejoy is unique, and you won't want to miss him. (Harper and Row, \$10.95)

★ ★ ★

If you long to take up the profession of espionage, Wolfgang Lotz will teach you some of the ropes in *A Handbook For Spies*. The author has been in the trade for years as an agent of the Israeli Secret Service. His book offers quite an insight into the spy business, including the renumeration you can expect, life in jails and prisons, and how to depart without leaving any traces behind at the scene of the operation. If after all this you still thrive to work for M, the author provides a self-administered quiz. Take it and you receive some valuable clues as to how good an agent you might make. (Harper and Row, \$8.95)

★ ★ ★

Since Dame Agatha Christie is no longer with us, it is to be expected that books on her life and career will appear. An unusually interesting one is *A Talent to Deceive, An Appreciation of Agatha Christie* by Robert Barnard. Professor Barnard is himself a crime novelist of distinction and an Edgar nominee. His present work is in two sections: an extended essay on Dame Agatha and her techniques, which runs 126 pages, followed by a detailed and very valuable bibliography. WARNING: In his discourse the author gives away the endings of some of Dame Agatha's most intriguing puzzles. This will ruin them for you as too many commentaries about *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* have spoiled this unique work for multitudes. Apart from this, a most enjoyable and informative work. The bibliography alone is more than worth the price (Dodd Mead, \$10.00) ●

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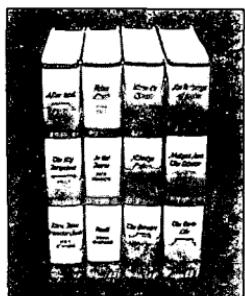
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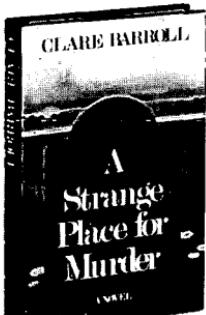
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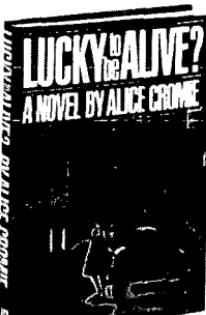
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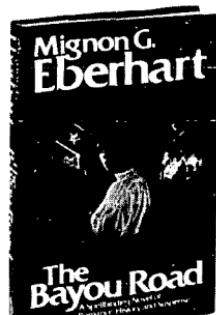
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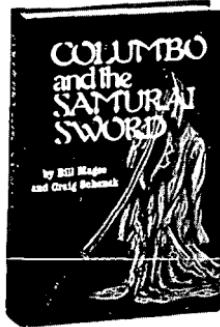
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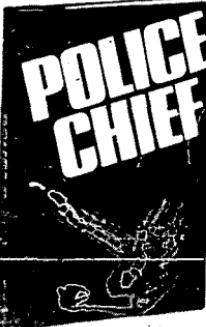
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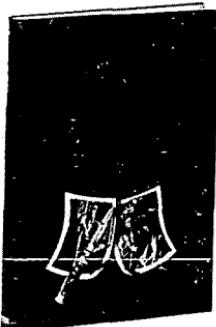
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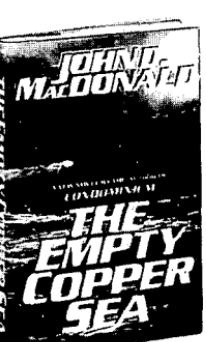
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